

The Element of Pathos in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye

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Abstract:

Chloe Anthony Wofford was born February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio a northern community located near Lake Erie as what was to be the second of four children of George Wofford and Ramah Willis Wofford. Her parents had moved to Ohio from the South to escape racism and to find better opportunities in the North. George found employment as a shipyard welder, but often worked three jobs in order support his family. He was a hardworking and dignified man who took a great deal of pride in the quality of his work, so that each time he welded a perfect seam he'd also weld his name onto the side of the ship. He also made sure to be well-dressed, even during the Depression. Her mother was a church-going woman and she sang in the choir. At home, Chloe heard many songs and tales of Southern black folklore. The Woffords were proud of their heritage.

Chloe Wofford then attended, with the financial aid of her parents, the prestigious Howard University in Washington, D.C. where she majored in English with a minor in classics. Since many people couldn't pronounce her first name correctly, she changed it to **Toni**, a shortened version of her middle name. She joined a repertory company, the Howard University Players, with whom she made several tours of the South. She saw firsthand the life of the blacks there, the life her parents had escaped by moving north. Toni Wofford graduated from Howard University in 1953 with a B.A. in English. She then attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and received a master's

degree in 1955. After graduating, Toni Wofford was offered a job at Texas Southern University in Houston, where she taught introductory English. Unlike Howard University, where black culture was neglected or minimized, at Texas Southern they always had Negro history week and introduced to her the idea of black culture as a discipline rather than just personal family reminiscences. In 1957 she returned to Howard University as a member of faculty and there she met Harold **Morrison**, a Jamaican architect she married in 1958. This was a time of civil rights movement and she met several people who were later active in the struggle.

Introduction:

PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN CHARACTER

I think black women are in a very special position regarding black feminism, an advantageous one. White women generally define black women's role as the most repressed because they are both black and female and these two categories invite a kind of repression that is pernicious. But in an interesting way, black women are much more suited to aggressiveness in the mode that feminists are recommending, because they have always been both mother and laborer, mother and worker and the history of black women in the States is an extremely painful and unattractive one, but there are parts of that history that were conducive to doing more, rather than less, in the days of slavery. We think of slave women as women in the house, but they were not, most of them worked in the fields along with the men. They were required to do physical labor in competition with them, so that their

relations with each other turned out to be more comradeship than male dominance/female subordination. When they were in the field plowing or collecting cotton or doing whatever, the owner of the slaves didn't care whether they were women or men the punishment may have varied they could beat both and rape one, so that women could receive dual punishment, but the requirements were the same, the physical work requirements. So I have noticed among a certain generation of black men and women older black men and women the relationship is more one of the comradeship than you-do-this-and-I-do-this and it's not very separate. In addition, even after slavery, all of us knew in my generation, that we always had to work, whether we were married or not. We anticipated it, so we did not have the luxury that I see certain middle class white women have, of whether to work or to have a house. Work was always going to be part of it. When we feel that work and the house are mutually exclusive, then we have serious emotional or psychological problems and we feel oppressed. But if we regard it as just one more thing you do, it's an enhancement. Black women are both ship and safe harbor.

Toni Morrison merged those two words, black and feminist, growing up, because I was surrounded by black women who were very tough and very aggressive and who always assumed they had to work and rear children and manage homes. They had enormously high expectations of their daughters and cut no quarter with us it never occurred to me that was feminist activity. You know, my mother would walk down to a theater in that little town that had just opened, to make sure that they were not segregating the population black on this side, white on that. And as soon as it opened

up, she would go in there first and see where the usher put her and look around and complain to someone. That was just daily activity for her and the men as well. So it never occurred to me that she should withdraw from that kind of confrontation with the world at large. And the fact that she was a woman wouldn't deter her. She was interested in what was going to happen to the children who went to the movies the black children and her daughters, as well as her sons. So I was surrounded by people who took both of those roles seriously. Later, it was called feminist behavior. I had a lot of trouble with those definitions, early on. And I wrote some articles about that and I wrote *Sula* really, based on this theoretically brand new idea, which were women should be friends with one another. And in the community in which I grew up, there were women who would choose the company of a female friend over a man, anytime. They were really sisters, in that sense.

CONCLUSION:

The Bluest Eye is mostly concerned with the experience of African-American women in the 1940. It presents a realistic view of the options for these women they could get married and have children, work for white families, or become prostitutes. The novel also thematizes the culture of women and young girls, emphasizing beauty magazines, playing with dolls and identifying with celebrities.

Feelings of jealousy and envy permeate *The Bluest Eye*. From Claudia and Frieda's jealousy of Maureen Peal to Pauline envying the uppity women of Lorain, Ohio, women seem to experience envy all day, every day. In some instances, jealousy can bring women closer together, as when the MacTeer sisters bond over their mutual

hatred of Maureen. At other times, jealousy keeps girls and women from being friends with one another.

Race and class are nearly inextricable in *The Bluest Eye*, since there were so many economic barriers for African-Americans during this time period. The African-American citizens of Lorain that we encounter are mostly working-class folks who work in coal mines or as domestic servants for white families. The breakdown of community is another aspect of this theme, since many of the characters who identify with middle-class white culture feel the need to separate themselves from lower-class blacks, or black e mos, which they associate with criminality and laziness.

Love is something that many characters in *The Bluest Eye* desire. Claudia admires the women in blues songs, pining after their lovers. Pauline spends countless hours daydreaming about love at the movies. Pecola wants blue eyes, which she thinks will make her more loveable. In the case of Pauline and Pecola, the idea is if someone loved me, I would be saved my life would be completely different. The idea that love could lead to salvation is one that gets tested in the novel and the novel should get us thinking about whether or not this vision of love is one that is sustainable.

Sex in *The Bluest Eye* is awkward, humiliating, shameful, violent and illegal sometimes all at once. With the exception of Mr. MacTeer whom we basically never see, all of the major male characters Cholly Breedlove, Mr. Henry and Soaphead Church sexually desire young girls. As far as we know, Soaphead never, or rarely, acts on these desires the novel keeps this ambiguous, but Mr. Henry gropes Frieda and Cholly rapes his daughter Pecola at least twice, maybe more.

The larger point of all this is that black girls in the novel are victims, sexually and socially powerless. Adolescence for these girls does not involve having harmless crushes or discovering sexuality on their own things we might expect of teenage girls. Rather, the young black girls in this novel are used to make the men feel more powerful. When we think about the importance of sex in the novel, we might consider how sex interacts with the intense power dynamics that Morrison establishes between white men, African-American men and African-American women.

Reference:-

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