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Feminine Sensibility in Toni Morrison

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ABSTRACT: Late-twentieth century black feminist critiques written about Toni Morrison's fiction framed her as an invaluable figure within the black feminist tradition. On March 3rd, 2020, in response to a *New York Magazine* article, "The Best Books for Budding Black Feminists, According to Experts," Dr. Sami Schalk tweeted, "To be on a Black feminist reading list alongside baddies like [Roxanne Gay], [Brittany Cooper], & [Janet Mock], as well as black feminist foremothers like Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde & Octavia Butler is incredibly humbling. Feminism and Ethnicity have political and cultural connotations. Different waves of feminism over the centuries have endeavoured to liberate women and to carve a place for women in society. Several novelists, especially the novelists of New Literatures portray the realistic picture of women. Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize winner of first black woman not only reached the peak of literary veneration, but also wrote thematically arresting and emotionally moving novels. The *Bluest Eye* (1970) the first novel remains one of the best. Being a multi-faceted woman, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *Beloved*. The author of this article traverses through her novels. The *Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987) *Love* (2003) and *A Mercy* (2008) to explore how Toni Morrison depicted feminism and ethnicity.

The novelist plays the role of ethnic cultural feminist and tries to alleviate prejudices and misconceptions and seeks ways to reinforce the value that racism and sexism would take away from the beauty, the work and the cultural values of black women. Feminism is a response to gender issues, women fighting for an equally acknowledged voice among men. White feminists tend to struggle against gender issues within a gender community; yet, many have made a habit of ignoring the voices of black feminists who are also fighting for racial equality. Because many black feminists feel they can't trust white feminists to respond to gender and racial issues, they find more support within their racial community than a gender community. Some black feminists groups such as the Combahee River Collective "feel solidarily with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists advocate"(Davis 16). Although the racial community is a source of support against racism, it too can ignore the black woman's struggle With Black woman's voice: "... we struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with black men about sexism." People everywhere are so focused on the pandemic and its impact on life and society that commemorating literary landmarks might make one seem disengaged these days. Yet, it is precisely this backdrop – that of a global scourge highlighting the fissures in the fabric of our democracies – that makes Nobel laureate Black American writer Toni Morrison deeply relevant to us today as we mark the first anniversary of her death.

I. INTRODUCTION

The black women in Morrison's *Sula* (1973) are different from submissive and easy- controlled black women who are oppressed by the black community in general and the white males in particular. Morrison's *Sula* focuses on the individuality of the black woman. *Sula*, the central figure of the novel, is a black woman who suffers at hands of whites and blacks. She rejects the traditional norms ascribed to women in society. Therefore; Morrison attempts to show the individuality of an African-American woman struggling for identity.[1]

L. Devika Rani observes that *Sula* is different from other controlled black women in her society in that she "challenges the social norms that deny a woman her individual rights" (p.90) She is presented as a very daring and adventurous character who plainly defies the restrictions imposed on her individuality and breaks all links of blood and human relationships in her search to confirm her selfhood. K. Sumana points out that:

Sula opens up new literally and critical option not only for the study of the text by African-American women but for African-American literary study more generally. The novel certainly helps to set a new agenda for black women's social and narrative possibilities.



Toni Morrison's third novel won her the very prestigious National Book Critics' Award for fiction in 1977. This award and subsequent critical acclaim, coupled with the financial success of *Song of Solomon*, made Morrison a premier contemporary American writer. Compared to the criticism of Morrison's prior two books, the volume of criticism of *Song of Solomon* was very high. The criticism appeared in popular periodicals, academic journals, dissertations and books. Generally, the critical assessments of the novel can be placed in three categories--Euro- American, Afro-American and feminist.[2]

The Euro-American critical perspective tends to focus on the classical elements of the novel; the Afro-American perspective tends to include classical elements, but focuses on black awareness; and the feminist perspective tends to include classical elements and/ or black awareness, but focuses on the problems of black feminine socialization. Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship, edited by Shari Benstock; *Black Time: Fiction of Africa, the Caribbean and the United States*, by Bonnie J. Barthold; *Paradoxical Resolutions: American Fiction and James Joyce*, by Craig Hansen Weiner; *Terrorists and Novelists*, by Diane Johnson; *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women in the Novel in Contemporary Experiences*, by Joan s. Frye; *The Afro-American Novel Since 1960*, edited by Bruck and Kaner; *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, edited by Pryse and Spillers; and *The World of Toni Morrison: Explorations in Literary Criticism*, by Jones and Vinson.

II. DISCUSSION

With the death of Toni Morrison at 88, writers all around the world feel like they've lost a literary mother. Morrison was one of the most influential and important American writers of her time. She was awarded the *Nobel Prize* in Literature in 1993, followed by the *Presidential Medal of Freedom* by Barack Obama in 2012. In addition to the Nobel, Morrison won a *Pulitzer Prize* (for "*Beloved*") and the *National Book Critics Circle Award* (for "*Song of Solomon*"). A 2006 New York Times Book Review poll of 124 prominent authors, critics, and editors named "*Beloved*" as the single best work of American fiction published in the previous 25 years. According to Collins in *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge Consciousness and The politics Empowerment*, there are two elements that become problematic for African of American women. First, under slavery Afro American women worked without wage in the allegedly public sphere of southern agriculture and they had routinely violated. Second, they were separated from workingin family household suffer from deficient idea of gender ideology (2000: 47).[3] In conclusion, Afro American women become less 'feminine', because they work outside from home, work for wage and compete with men, and their occupation take them away from their children. As one of the consequences of the phenomena, Afro American women experienced as mothers who have been shaped by the dominant, especially since children followed the condition of their mother. Any children who were born in such condition must be seen as the product of rape. In this problem, one of author such as Toni Morrison presented literary works which concerned on the identityof Afro American women and alsoas part of Morrison's project to call attention onthe way of whiteness was constructed and Morrison showed this construction though typically by critics in text by writing the novels. According to Brooks, postfeminism is the way of concept to look for the construction of woman related to their historical problems, and refers to a shift in understanding construction of identity like woman, man, and feminist. The use of concept postfeminism is emerged by initiative in 15 government industry, is marked by man and women equality (1997). Basically, it tends to debate about the issues of victimization, because of critical of any definition of women as victims who are unable to control their own lives, and body, also it can be said that postfeminism is a flexible theory which can be adapted to see individual needs and desires by considering position within feminist histories.

We don't live in places where we can hear those stories anymore; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological archetypl stories that we heard years ago.[4]
Toni Morrison

III. RESULTS

Now that the Afro-American artistic presence has been "discovered" actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing the witnesses and erasing their meaningful place in and contribution to American culture, it is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always being imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dinesen's "aspects of nature," nor Conrad's unspaking. We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and



participants in our own experience, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, "other". We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare those centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar. [5]

As Morrison states in the passage quoted above, it is time to recognize how black people are showing themselves imaginatively and artistically. And this is what she intends to do in her work: to write imaginatively and artistically about her own people and their silenced history.

Tony Morrison is considered one of the most outstanding figures of contemporary African-American Literature. Her career as a writer has undergone a great change since the publication of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. At that time it seems that American literary criticism was not yet ready to accept a black woman writer as someone worth paying attention to. Who could have imagined that twenty years later Morrison would be canonized by literary critics and be considered a great novelist?

Eco-feminism calls for an end to all oppressions. Eco-feminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal Western society. Thinkers like Linda Vance argue that eco-feminism must re-conceptualize the relationship of Woman and Nature as "sisters" based on shared oppression of the Woman and the non-human world. Both Nature and Women are important themes in Toni Morrison's novels which provide the appropriateness of applying this theory to her novels. "The bluest eye" is her first novel and usually studied in terms of Psychoanalytic Critics, Postcolonial Critics and Feminist Critics According to data collection, this research was worth doing. Moreover, this novel could largely represent theories of eco-feminism and the early thoughts of Toni Morrison. Cultural eco-feminism has been analyzed through the illustration of rape, menstruation and natural images in the novel. These illustrations emphasize women's femininity and the connections with nature. Through the kitchen in which the story takes place and the description of housework, the concept of social eco-feminism can be seen.[6]

IV. CONCLUSION

The feminist analysis of *The Bluest Eye* attempts a reading that views the texts as an ethnic, cultural and political response to the racist, sexist patriarchal and capitalist oppression and domination of the blacks. Her responsibility as a black artist is to cultivate black cultural consciousness, to enlighten and strengthen the values of black cultural heritage. *The Bluest Eye* makes a scathing attack on the imposition of white standards of beauty on black women and presents a critic of dominant aesthetic that is internalized by majority of black community which exercises a hegemonic control over the lives of black Americans. Toni Morrison represents Pecola, who feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglected the Western standards of beauty under racial pressure of the dominant culture. The feminist perspective on incestuous violence against Pecola, reveals that as no other expression of male superiority is within the reach of Cholly and possessing his own daughter which makes her life to become a wasteland. Pauline's rejection of Pecola becomes the cause of her, self-deception and doom. Pauline embraces the trapping of African American Christianity, she clings to Western notion, which glorifies the future and undervalues the past and belittles the present. The social forces which ruined Pecola are still rampant in the country. African American has no resources with which to fight the standards presented to them by white culture that scorn them. Even though *The Bluest Eye* set in 1940s, Morrison integrates thesis pressure that blacks feel to love up to the white society's standards of beauty with racism. She barrows down her audience to women and say that there were no books on her and did not exist in all literature, but she writes to fill in the gap. So the novel not only protests against colonization and racial discrimination but also reveals women's struggle to strive and thrive.

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