



The Construction of White Supremacy through White Ideals in The Bluest Eye

Weiwei Deng, Jun Deng, Hai Bai, Anjie Gong, Fanglan Shu

Sichuan University of Arts and Sciences, Dazhou, Sichuan, China

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Abstract: In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison stresses the destructiveness of white ideals and its manipulative impact on value production. The point is also highlighted by Fanon. As stated by Oliver, Fanon indicates Oliver further points out that, through economic subordination and the technological propaganda of images of inferior black figure, colonization along with racism successfully colonizes the black's body and mind. The technological propaganda of images of inferior black people aims to shape the black's view of the world and form the black's sense of themselves. Morrison concurs with Oliver's opinion on the colonizing effect of the all-pervasiveness of images of the inferior black. Morrison dramatizes the racist condition of black subjects who are overwhelmed by white images in white culture and, as a result, reinserted into the racist discourses of white/beautiful/civilized and black/ugly/primitive in *The Bluest Eye*.

Keywords: Toni Morrison; *The Bluest Eye*; the white ideals; racism

1. The Cultural Production of White Ideal of Beauty

In Pecola's short stay with the Macteer's, two gifts she receives demonstrate the colonizing effect of white images: the milk which Pecola drinks three-quarters in a single day and the cup that has blue-and-white Shirley Temple on it. However, Pecola is more interested in the cup itself. In the 1930s, Hollywood movie theaters widely promoted the image of the white child star carried by the cup. The image, here in the form of a cup, captures Pecola. She drinks three quarts of milk only to take "every opportunity to...see sweet Shirley's face"(Morrison 23). Apart from the cup, when Pecola consumes candies, she couldn't help but notice the picture of Mary Jane on the wrapping paper. There was a "smiling white face", "blond hair in gentle disarray"(43) and a pair of blue eyes watching her from a clean and comfortable world. By eating candies and drinking with the Shirley Temple cup, Pecola has the illusion that she turns into a little white girl with blond hair and blue eyes. The white images on the cup and the wrapper are precisely the means for the white to control meaning production. [3]

Morrison uncovers the fact that the images of white figure on the surfaces of the cup and wrapper are associated with beauty. She, in her depiction of Pecola's frenzies towards the white figure or the representative of ideals of beauty, takes a dig at the figure's hypocritical superiority, which stems from a racist culture that privileges it as the norm/standard and the object of desire. In this way, the ideological construction of racial difference Fanon emphasizes in *Black Skin, White Masks* is revealed by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*. As the novel demonstrates so inexorably, Pecola's tragedy stems from the way she believes the superiority logic behind the cultural production of whiteness as the signifier of beauty and hence becomes self-alienated, renouncing blackness as the signifier of ugliness. [2]

Pauline, Pecola's mother, is also a victim to the ideological construction of racial difference and the advertisement of whiteness as the signifier of beauty. As Pecola's fascination with Shirley Temple's image suggests, mass media such as cinema plays an essential role in producing images of whiteness as beautiful in *The Bluest Eye*. Its effects are explored with particular details about Pauline, who, like her daughter, avidly consumes the "black-and-white"(122) images projected by the film. These images free Pauline from her unrest marriage with Cholly, and thus get her a moment of joy and relief as she: "went to the movies instead wherein the dark her memory was refreshed" and grasps an understanding of the idea of romantic love and physical beauty, "probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought"(122).

First, the teaching of physical beauty is destructive in the novel since its concept is developed in a context of racial differences constructed by western culture. Because Pauline is black, she is defined as ugly at birth because of her racial identity. What is yet more destructive about the glamour of white beauty, however, is how it is internalized and becomes, for Pauline, a ruthless standard of judgment: "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty"(122). The term "education" implies the performing ideological indoctrination the constantly movie-going Pauline gets through. Pauline herself also mentions her collaboration in these processes:

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I'd go early, before

the show started. They'd cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in the pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet(123).

The distance between the black female audience and the "white man" and "women" she sees is blurred by Pauline's opening confession: "The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show". The meaning of the sentence is that Pauline satisfies herself when she is watching the movie. However, the wording of the sentence implies Pauline's actually featuring in the movies that she watches. The ambiguity is also obvious elsewhere: "Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in the pictures"(123). Pauline's identification with the white image (the image of Jean Harlow) also shows the linguistic ambiguity. Pauline recalls one time when she goes to the cinema to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. She fixes her hair and uses the hairstyle of her idol that she sees in the magazine, claiming "It makes me "just like her. Well, almost just like"(123).

Pauline sits on the seat, biting on the candy and fantasizing that she is her idol. At the same time, the images of Pauline and Pecola were magically merged into one. Her daughter is also capable of transforming herself into the image she desires: "To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane"(50). Morrison, in the mother and daughter's craving to be the white images in the advertisement, proves to her reader the destructiveness of racist production of values which can have adverse impact on both black's psyche and mind. In this case, Morrison attempts to reveal the damaging effect of the white's utter control over the means of production of all meanings .

Morrison, through her delineation of the black who assents to the cultural production of white images as beautiful, again notes the phoney racial difference between the black and the white that is ideologically constructed. The black's learned through "education" of images that whiteness is the signifier of beauty while blackness signifies ugliness.

2. The Cultural Production of White Ideals of Family and Womanhood

Aside from "education" of racialized beauty, the black in *The Bluest Eye* also receives ideological indoctrination of white's superiority in the school system betokened by the "Dick and Jane" primer.

For Fanon, "there is... a series of propositions that slowly and subtly", under the help of schools and their texts"(152) enters people's minds and shapes their views(152). Morrison lays bare the functions of schools and textbooks in ideologically constructing racial differences. The blue-eyed narrative begins with the "Dick and Jane" primer. The stories and images in the primer show an image of the idealized white middle-class household. Morrison shows us that the contrast between a white family's ideal life presented to all children and the harsh reality of black life cultivates a little black girl's desire for the white family ideal. As Morrison explains in an interview, "the primer, with its picture of a happy family, with white children, was the way life was presented to black people"(28). She thus employs primer excerpts to frame the chapters in the novel that are not narrated by Claudia. The chapter on Pauline Breedlove's youth, for example, begins with a fragment of the "Dick and Jane" primer concerning the maternal ideal: "SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE"(110). The primer functions to offer bitter contrast to the harsh, unrelenting reality of existence for the black characters. The primer excerpts denoting white picket fences and suburban comfort provide an ironic contrast to the grim depictions of poverty, alcoholism, absent fathers, abuse, and self-abjection of the black family that Morrison depicts. The distinction between the perfect world of a white family and the poor black life prompts the black girl to long for the ideal family life depicted in the primer, identifying with the white life as the ideal of family. [4]

Wong suggests, unlike the perfect world represented in a primer, the novel, through the depiction of the Fisher household' domestic space, reveals "the very conditions of alienated self-containment which underlie white superiority"(Wong 476). Morrison stresses the literal whiteness in her depiction of the heart of the Fisher's domestic space, their kitchen. Racist ideologies serve as the architects of Fisher's domestic space. The white woman, interestingly, has been written out of the space by Morrison. The mistress of the house is relieved from the burdens of domestic duties, and her position is replaced with a servant of the lower race. The absence of the white mistress speaks of white's authority in the household. At the same time, the black servant's status is reduced to that of an ornamental property. Carby argues that degrading the maid to "utilitarian property" status of a white family and her status as a black strengthens the legitimacy of classifying him as commodity(Carby 78). Morrison carefully explores Pauline's relationship with the Fisher family, emphasizing her role as a servant and an exploited black in building and maintaining fancy white houses, thus reproducing the racist relations between the white and the black.[1]

The ideal of white family is learned from the textual fiat prescribed by the "Dick and Jane" primer in its presentation of the perfect white world. Moreover, school and their texts play a significant role in the novel's investigation of womanhood/femininity. The logic of the white is to show only the images of white women in mass media industry, making it impossible

for black women to identify with whiteness as the ideal of femininity. Over time, the white dominates in femininity and becomes its spokesman, and the logic is imperceptible and taught in the daily lives of the black everyday in the novel. Morrison provides a vivid depiction of the teaching process. The black girls acquire the knowledge of the ideal of femininity in various ways. They gain knowledge of the ideal when they come across pretty white girls who prompt “the eye slide of black women”. Moreover, the black is trained to internalize the ideal through the “possessive gentleness of their touch” when they treat white babies on the street(22-23). They obtain knowledge of it in witnessing black women’s desire for white babies as they coos at them, eyes softening around them. Their everyday living serves as sites of ideological intake in which concepts are taken in and absorbed.

Claudia’s examination of her doll discovers the “mere metal roundness” which lies at the heart of the doll’s desirability. Anthony Berret stresses this connection, observing that “as an expensive gift, the doll represents modern culture’s devotion to ownership and display”(269). The doll, very symbol of femininity, derives its “dearness” from its commodity status. Anthony here suggests that, outside the realm of economic exchange, the doll’s “mere metal roundness” becomes meaningless, useless. The ideal of femininity, the very symbol of feminine desirability, derives its “dearness” from its commodity status. Morrison shows that the ideal of white femininity is taught so often, transmuted in so many different forms, that its messages becomes absorbed and internalized.

The first chapter answers the research question: what leads to the psychic problem of the black in *The Bluest Eye*? The chapter may shed light on how the border between the white and the black is established and how racial difference is ideologically constructed and indoctrinated into the black’s minds in *The Bluest Eye*. In discovering the cause of the black pathologies in the novel, two forces of spiritual colonization come into sight. One is the inscription of the white gaze, which reduces the black character like the Breedlove’s into animal parts, being of nonexistence and emblem of everything the white deem hateful in that society. The other forces that sets the racial border in the novel is control over value system that defines the ideal of beauty and femininity in terms of whiteness, thereby forcing the black to renounce black features as a signifier of ugliness. The two mechanisms serve to colonize both the mind and body of the black and are the root of the psychic problem of the black ranging from self-reproach, running away from home to schizophrenia in *The Bluest Eye*. [5]

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