Abstract

This essay explores how *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison examines the influences of outside forces such as race, class, and gender on the main character Pecola Breedlove. Morrison portrays the ways in which internalised racism and beauty ideals influence her as the most vulnerable member of a community: a young black girl. Influenced by her own youth in 1940s America, combined with the black cultural movement of the 1960s, Morrison wrote a story of an unfortunate child in response to a lack of representations of children and female protagonists by her contemporary African American writers. *The Bluest Eye* depicts a young black girl growing up in a world without parental affection, robbing her of the ability to love herself, and therefore of succeeding in the world. In a society that privileges white over black, and further connects whiteness with beauty but blackness with ugliness, she learns from her parents and her community that she is inherently ugly. Morrison uses various forms of media to establish traits and values that the African American community tries to achieve. For instance, Pecola starts believing that her life would be better if she had blue eyes, like the ones pretty little white girls have. Through her wish, Morrison illustrates that these values are arbitrary and do not exist in nature. In addition to being emotionally and physically abused by her parents, Pecola is made a scapegoat by her community, signalising an African American community that places its own racial shame onto her already delicate self image. Morrison uses several different individuals, including her parents, the ‘brown girl’ Geraldine, Mr. Yacobowski, and Maureen Peal, as well as a number of different situations, some seriously traumatising while others less so, to illustrate Pecola’s victimisation. Through prolonged exposure to abuse, and ultimately the last blow that is her father raping her, Pecola’s life is shattered.