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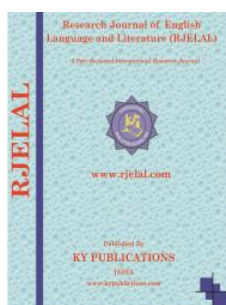
THE BIBLICAL AND CLASSICAL MYTHS IN MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE* AND *SULA*

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison who is the most celebrated Black woman novelist of America world prominently appeared on literary view in the 1960s. She inscribed themes such as White racism, women, social realism, politics, and difficulty. She became flourishing in producing symbolically about race and women. She has emphasized the relationship between the work of art and its political relevance. Morrison was born in the town of Lorain, Ohio, USA, in 1931. Morrison uses the element of aesthetics in her novels. Her novels focus on political, cultural, and racial factors. She attempts to use aesthetic element in her writing to show Black misery and desolation. The myth is a kind of Meta language that can be communicated across generations and culture. Adaptation of mythical elements concerning a different culture into one's own is a common practice by writers all over the world. The absorption of a myth into different cultures can be related to the theme of universality. Morrison's appropriation of biblical mythology stems from this age-old tradition of appropriation where one culture co-opts materials from others. Along with biblical myths Morrison also re-situates many of the biblical symbols in her novels. A myth can be defined as a traditional story accepted as history which serves to explain the world-view of a people.

Keywords: Myth, culture, Biblical.

In Morrison's novels there can be found such instances of overlapping. Stories and narratives become influential in crafting the identity of entities about others, and symbols, in this regard, it may be seen as embedded in connective tissue of myth. Morrison's appropriation of the biblical myths and symbols is always done with a critical angularity as she, through her use of these myths and symbols, articulates the living condition of the Blacks in America. Morrison's appropriation of biblical mythology stems from this age-old tradition of appropriation where one culture co-opts materials from others. Morrison seems to say "the Bible is the wrong book for blacks." (1) Along with biblical myths,

Morrison also re-situates many of the biblical symbols in her novels. A myth can be defined 'I as a traditional story accepted as history which serves to explain the world-view of a people. Morrison's use of biblical and classical myths can be studied from the above perspective as an act of waving this experience of the Black community as well as recognition of the influence of the Bible.

Exotic, Fantastical worlds from Morrison's childhood are woven intricately into the tapestry of her work .they appear larger than life linked as they are with folklore, magic, superstition, fable, poetry, song and

myth. The characters are uniquely named from the Bible. (2)

However, Toni Morrison is not the first African American writer to take recourse to biblical mythology. We have already a tradition of Black writers who have incorporated biblical elements in their fictional oeuvre in addition to the incorporation of biblical myths and symbols by the white writers in their canon. The *Bluest Eye* is a very sad story about a young Black girl's desire to have a pair of blue eyes. This impossible wish has at its base a painful history, both familial and communal. The young aspirant is named Pecola Breedlove, and she hails from a disintegrated family where her mother and father do not act in unison to protect their child; rather they fight and live lives marked by irresponsibility. The narrator in the novel, Claudia MacTeer, a young girl of the same age as Pecola, remembers with horror the time when, to the surprise and dismay of the community, Pecola was put 'outdoors' by her father. She recollects:

Outdoors, we knew, was it the real terror of life... To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing - unfortunate, but an aspect of life over which you had no control since you could not control your income. But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one's own kin outdoors - that was criminal. (3)

Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. This act of Cholly Breedlove's putting his family outdoors can be related to the 'Ugly Duckling' tale when the duckling was forced to spend the winter outside in a pool. However, Morrison does not make use of this fairy tale motif only as a frame of reference for her novel. Pecola's story can be read in relation to the myth of Job in the Bible as well. In the Bible Job is the central character in the book named after him. We find Job as a wealthy landowner living in the land of Uz, on the borders of Idumea. The Book of Job' relates the story of Job who falls from the grace of God as he bears the brunt of a debate between God and his chief adversary Satan. He suffers at what seems to be an arbitrary judgment of God.

Pecola's tale carries subtle •reverberations from the story of Job. Like Job, Pecola is 'also at the receiving end of what seems to be a divine retribution for no conceivable sin committed on her part to deserve such, treatment. However, Morrison's delineation of the sad tale of a little, innocent Black girl is also radically different from that of Job in the Bible. Pecola's miserable condition is created by the racism accepted in the society, and not by a conflict between God and Satan whose altercation resulted in the misery of Job. Infact, Pecola's suffering can not be reasonably explained as justified. The analogy between the biblical patriarch and the mid-twentieth century little black girl herself may also seem farfetched to a casual reader. At the end of the novel, Pecola goes for help to a person called Soaphead Church. Church's original name was Elihue Micah Whitcomb. The choice of such a first name makes apparent the intention of the novelist to draw parallel between Job and Pecola; the adviser who actually helped Job to understand the reason of his plight and suggested a remedial measure is called Elihu in the Bible.

Pecola's mother does not provide her with any sense of protection as she is too busy tending the child of the White family whom she serves. Grown up on a diet of Hollywood, Pauline comes to repudiate her own origin. She cannot even love her daughter who, for her, is too ugly to deserve attention. Pauline also grew up believing in her ugliness; however, unlike her mother who tried to console her, she leaves Pecola defenseless. Despite Cholly's attempts, she chooses to see her ugliness. She does not accept her true self and becomes judgmental and, even, condescending. Her belief in her religiosity is also marked by a similar disparaging attitude.

Through the miserable condition of her characters, Morrison portrays an essential " picture of the lives of .Blacks in America who still experience the impact of slavery on their lives. Pecola is ostracized by the community and this ostracizing is executed in almost a ritualistic manner. In her final summation of Pecola's tragedy, Claudia realizes Pecola's role in shaping up the community. The unfortunate tale of Pecola can also be related to the 'scapegoat myth'. The term 'scapegoat' comes from

a Hebrew ritual that is described in the book of Leviticus; in the Bible. The ritual Morrison's portrayal of Pecola's tragedy also highlights the inadequacy of the Western concept of religion which is based upon a binary system of values, upon an either/or thinking. Pauline represents this either or thinking in the novel. Apart from the dualistic Western theology and its concept of the Holy Trinity, the African religious system believes in ' different aspect of God.

Morrison' second novel, *Sula*, Morrison again explores the dimension of what can be called the fourth face of God, a face that explains the existence of evil. Allen Alexander has• noted how in many African tribal or traditional religions God is held to be the agency that is responsible for the existence of evil. Instead of the Judaic God who is punitive, the African tribes consider God to be an amateur who is trying to better the world but not knowing what he is doing. The Zulu tradition believes the evil to be autonomous but at the same time drawing strength from positive sources. Likewise, the Ashanti holds evil to be subservient to God, but drawing power from it. The Yoruba even believes the evil to be operating with God's approval.

In *Sula*, the community's attitude towards Sula is marked by its belief in this fourth face of God: "in their secret awareness of Him, He was not the God of three faces they sang about. They knew quite well He had four, and that the fourth explained Sula" (4)

Here is an instance of deliberate departure from the Christian myth of of the trinity. Sula exhibits the African attitude vis-a-vis evil. Unlike the dualistic Western theology, it does not try to eradicate but learns to live with it as a part of God's creation. Like the community in *The Bluest Eye* which performed a ritualistic cleaning at the cost of Pecola, the black community in *Sula* also hardens itself against Sula and defines itself in contradistinction to her. The narrator observes: Their belief in Sula's evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had

left to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil. They had lived with various forms of evil all their days, and it wasn't that they believed God would take care of them. It was rather that they knew that God had a brother and that brother hadn't spared God's son, so why should he spare them. (5) Though *Sula* is considered evil by the community, it is not wholly impossible to bring in the association of Jesus, as, like Pecola, she also helps the community to get purified at the cost of herself. Therefore, Sula is made the scapegoat. The mystic ritual of the scapegoat calls back to ancient origins, and Christ's trial 'and crucifixion can be considered in the light of the above. Again, Sula's story can also be seen in connection with the myth of Cain in the ' Bible. Though Cain is associated with the act of fratricide, an act Sula does not commit; Sula " can be viewed as a Cain figure as she becomes instrumental, albeit accidentally, to the killing of Chicken Little. Like Cain, she too refuses to mourn this event or repent her action. Displacement and re-situation of the major biblical myths in a different context have been a common practice among literary practitioners through ages. The myth of Cain can be cited, for instance. In the Bible, Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. Of the two of Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Both of them had offerings for God who accepted Abel's but did not like Cain's. Cain got jealous of his brother and killed Abel. God discovered the crime and banished Cain from his sight to wander through the world

Morrison makes use of more contemporary mythology - the myth of a nation-formation. She lays bare the exclusionary politics that such a story underscores. By incorporating such a varied mythical and folkloric elements, Morrison not only increases the scope of her novel~ but also offers us a comprehensive view point regarding the actual condition of the Blacks in America. The present study explores Toni Morrison's unique formation of myth and mythology in her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. It shows the relationship between African-American myths and Classical myths within the context of the novels.

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