

Subject:

A Bakhtinian Study of The Problem of Identity
In
Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

By:

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Chapter I

Introduction

General Overview

The idea of relationship and communication has been always the main concern of the writers of different genres in different era from the beginning of time that man can write and read. Literature and art were the worlds in which man can find the howness and whatness of that relationship between people, in different literary genres like: epic, romance, drama, sonnet, verse, to name just a few. But, gradually, especially from the period of Victorian age, man's tendency and taste and so the writer's gift for genres started to change and yearn for other different genres. It was an age of conflicting explanation and theories, of scientific and economic confidence, and of

social and spiritual pessimism, of a sharpened awareness of the inevitability of progress and of deep upheaval as to the nature of the present.

Consequently, the world of art and literature was not an exception among the others. In these periods of progress and change of man's life, one of the literary genres which became more and more acceptable is the novel, although the origin of novel probably refers back to previous centuries. Furthermore, it was the twentieth-century life and its complexities that paved the way for the emergence and inevitable dominance of novel. That is, the other genres are not so capable and qualified to contain the modern life and world, as well as their complexities. In short, novel becomes one of the most dominant literacy genres of the twentieth century (Childs 70).

Toni Morrison is one of the prominent novelists of her own time in the twentieth century in America. She was born in 1931, in northern Ohio.

From early childhood Morrison was an accomplished storyteller and reader, expected to excel in school. In 1949 Morrison graduated from Lorain High school and entered Howard University, Graduating with a B.A. in English in 1953, Morrison enrolled at Cornell University, receiving an M.A. in English in 1955. In 1967, she accepted a position at Random House in New York City and became a senior editor in 1968, a position she held until 1985. As senior editor, Morrison nurtured the talents of black writers such as Angela Davis and Toni Cade Bambara. Her own first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Set in the African-American Community, in Lorain Ohio, was published in 1970.

Morrison was associated professor of English at the State University of New York at Purchase in 1969, when she began to work on her second novel. *Sula*, was published in 1973. While Morrison was a visiting lecturer at Yale University (1975-

77), her third novel, *Song of Solomon*, was published. *Tar Babby* was published at the State university of New York at Albany (1984-89); Morrison received the New York State Governor's Art Award (1986) and was a visiting lecturer at Bard College (1986-88). Her next novel, *Beloved*, was nominated for the 1987 National Book Award and the National Book Critics Award, and was awarded both the 1987 National Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the Robert F. Kennedy Award. Her most recent novel, *Paradise*, was published in 1998.

She has received the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Award from the National Organization for Women and the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature, as well as honorary degrees from Oberlin College, Dartmouth College, Bryn Naur College, and Columbia and Yale universities.

Since 1989 Morrison has been Robert F. Goheen professor of the Humanities at Princeton University.

The Bluest Eye, Morrison's first novel, is the story of a victim of popular white culture and its pervasive advertising. It focuses on Pecola Breedlove, a lonely, young black girl living in Ohio in the late 1940s. Morrison presents the story of two major families living in the United States. It is the story of two Negro families living in Lorain Ohio: The Breedloves, and the MacTeers. The first family, Breedloves, is: Cholly, Pauline, Sammy, and Pecola. The Breedloves have lost their sense, codes and standards of beauty, community, responsibility, and identity. They are disabled in making any correct and normal relationships with their race, people, and society. They have been succumbed to the white standards of beauty, culture, and community. This loss of black morality, ethnicity, and beauty has lead to Breedlove's failure in life and identity.

Pauline, the mother of the family, leaves them and attaches a white family as housework and seeks refuge in it as well. Cholly, the father, feels a negative freedom and rapes his own eleven-year old daughter, Pecolla, and escapes. Pecolla falls in love with a pair of blue eyes in the presence of her own black beauty and brown eyes and finally gets mad.

MacTeers, the second family of the story, are a family of four: father, mother, and the two daughters, Claudia and Frieda. They have put their trust in their own black norms and standards and not only do they guard themselves against the white hegemonic system codes standards of beauty and community, but also they try to help the others and particularly Pecola as an outcast and mad individual in their black community.

The conflicting suitable values that Pecola internalizes are rooted in her parent's lives and experience as well. Although their actions as parents are reprehensible, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove have been unwittingly manipulated and wrapped by white culture. In depicting their experience, Morrison demonstrates the destructive impact of white culture on African American identity (Eckard 39).

The Significance of the Study

Many new critical approaches have been introduced in the modern literary theory and criticism. These new approaches help the critics and the theorists to interpret and study old and modern literary texts in new ways. One of these modes of interpretations is the Bakhtinian interpretation. He introduced the idea of dialogism, polyglossia, polyphony, chronotope and carnivalism to criticism, which are very crucial in clarifying the literary texts. For instance, his term polyphony deals with the

scrutiny of different voices in a literary text and such voices' undeniable roles in deciphering the relationship between different social classes.

To illustrate the roles of Bakhtinian theories in the interpretation of *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, his polyphony, Toni Morrison uses four different narrators each of which elucidates a different aspect, a social class, and communal problem of the black people. Yet the most outstanding term to be used in studying this novel is Bakhtin's model of tripartite psyche or 'Architectonic Self-hood.' The three parts of that model are *I-for-myself*, *I-for-the-other*, and *The-other-for-me* (Grodin 89).

To put it in a nutshell, Bakhtin states that man has to make a balance between these three aspects of psyche to make and have a normal and acceptable identity, personality, and behavior. He warns an individual about the dangers and difficulties of the other's Gaze which are brought to him or her with his self and psyche. To see and analyze one's self in the eyes and gazes of the other as Jean Paul Sartre states freezes and annihilates individual self and identity in the otherness of others, and as John Mcleod, in his post-colonial studies, declares, it ends up with the individual's ruin and loss of memory, ultimately, leading to his psychological trauma, the recovery of which is to be too much impossible and hardly achieved. To strengthen just the *I-for-the-other* aspect of the Bakhtin's model of psyche, to see just oneself in the eyes of oneself or *I-for-myself* aspect of psyche, or not to take others into the scope of one's *I-for-myself* aspect of psyche are all too destructive and menacing for the individuation or individuality and identity of an individual. Doing this, Bakhtin proposes a dialogic and mutual relationship between two sides of a social and communal contact and occurrence.

The thesis deals with these three aspects in the minds and psyches of the characters in the novel to show which aspect is strong or weak in each character.

Moreover, it traces the ways the characters overcome their communal and cultural problems in their own lives. That is why *The Problem of Identity and eyes* signifies so much in this paper.

The Statement of the Problem

The English Novelist, E.M. Forster, the writer of *A passage to India*, *Maurice*, and *Howards End*; as it is affirmed in his novels and articles, believes in religious non-belief. To put it better, Forster believes in nothing, but belief of relationship and connection among human beings and even non-human ones. In one of his articles, what I believe, asserts that if he was obliged to choose between his friend and his country to betray, he would choose to betray his country and not his friend since he is an individual who believes in a good and tight personal relationship between and among people to each other of every kind, colour, race, origin, and country. In fact, what Forster believes in is relationship or connection which has been examined thematically in his works by some critics such as R.A. Rao, in E.M. Forster's *A passage to India*, being regarded as the theme of "just to connect".

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel heroes and heroines, quiet often, suffer from a problem of "Insulation" not isolation. Insulation is different for Hawthorne from the isolation in the mode that in an insulative state of loneliness the hero or heroin is thought or regarded as an outdoor whose returning back to the community stands for a state of salvation and happiness in the life and world. That way, an individual's salvation, admiration, and ambitions are gratified and satisfied in the arms and embrace of the community. Therefore, in Hawthorne's eyes loneliness and insulation can collapse the individual's psyche and personality and lead to his or her failure in

contact with the society. Such a matter of insulation provides the paper with the main idea of importance and value of relationship because it is without a relationship or in the absence of a good and appropriate relationship among individuals that would be guided to and forced into isolation and annihilation in the community. Moreover, they likely are living in the society around the other individuals, but indeed they are lonely and outdoor since the individuals are spiritually and psychologically insulated and physically non-isolated (Waggoner 9).

One of the most striking communality between Hawthorn and Morrison in this respect lies in their anxiety for the individual and his gratitude in his communal life being shaped in the agenda of community due to the individual's sense of community. Further to Hawthorn's concept of insulation, in Toni Morrison's eyes, the black are a nation among whose members there should be a sense of community. For Morrison, neighborhood stands for community and community stands for responsibility for all members and individuals within that neighborhood-community. For instance the orphans and the mad are severely felt responsibility for. In a black neighborhood, when there is a mad individual, the other black individuals are supposed to take care of him or her, prepare a kind of internal-black asylum within the scope of that black neighborhood, try to help him or her be normalized, and provide him or her with all his or her financial, psychological, ... needs. Such a mad individual is not left to be alone and outdoor. Whenever an infant's mother is dead, the other black mothers try to milk it and grow it up. Thus nobody is left outdoor in a black family or community whenever the black individuals feel responsible for each other or in other words have got the sense of neighborhood and community. This communal sense reveals that there would be a relationship among the black people because of which the black feel responsible for each other.

The black or African American lady novelist, Toni Morrison's mind and works, particularly in the *The Bluest Eye*, are occupied with the concept of relationship between people in general and between the black and the white in particular. Most of all, in this novel she deals with the relationships between the blacks as a minor group or community and the black adults and the white as the major group. It is a matter of relationship between the majority and the minority. Moreover, what or who determines the standards and norms of this relationship becomes the most brilliant anxiety of Morrison's and her heroes' and heroines' in the novel. The goodness and quality of relationship is necessary to be defined and studied before all other aspects or perhaps the precious definitions and surmises need to be changed.

Her [Pecola's] fervent desire for blue eyes adds yet another layer of complexity to her experience because it reveals that she is as much a victim of her culture as she is of familial abuse. The blue eyes, which in Pecola's mind would grant her beauty and acceptability, symbolize the blond-hair, fair-skin standard of beauty revered in Western culture (Eckard 38).

Those above discussed ideas regarding the black communities and nations are codes, norms, and standards which make the black a nation or community, and it is what distinguishes the black as a minor or oppressed community versus the white major community one. In Morrison's viewpoint, "The Black Is Beautiful" due to its blackness, sense of community-neighborhood which has made its essence of nationhood. For instance, the black's habit of gossip is a part of black nationhood which makes them as a nation. Such a sense of communal responsibility, habit of gossip, art of black and blue music and singing and lullibays, and some other black ethical, ethnic codes and standards and other black national ancient and modern beliefs, myths, superstitions, tales, stories, to name just a few, are The Black Beauty

which Morrison strives to remind her black nation and community of (Sandra 98). In this regard, Morrison suffers and challenges to do her best for her people throughout writing some black stories and tales the habit and gift of which she has somehow received from her grandparents during her childhood, which itself can be studied as one of the black standard of nationhood and beauty. Thus then, for Morrison, Black Is Beautiful, and its beauty is its black pastness, sense of history, and responsibility which can guarantee and guard it against all the hegemonic assaults from the white and major communities. The black people beauty is their communicable sense of relationship in which nobody, even a mad, an orphan, or an eleven- year raped ugly girl is thought as an outdoor.

Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, in *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness*, writes:

The thesis of the novel is that racism devastates the self- image of African female in general and the African female child in particular. Toni Morrison's emphasis is on the society, not the family unit. According to her, the African's self image is destroyed at an early age as a result of the ruling class's (i.e., the European capitalist class's) promotion of its own standard of beauty: long, stringy hair, preferably blond; keen nose, thin lips; and light eyes, preferably blue. By analogy, if the physical features of the European are accepted as the standards of beauty, then the African must be ugly. (32-33).

This thesis concerns with Toni Morrison and her first great novel, *The Bluest Eye*. It deals, too, with Mikhail Bakhtin, and his ideas as one of the most remarkable Russian philosophers and critics of the twentieth century.

Toni Morrison as a black lady novelist is not indifferent to the black people. In Morrison's perspective, it would be so painful and agitative if the black people detach their own cultural belonging and attach the others' because she believes that the black

people's beauty and responsibility is their "Selfhood" and "Identity" which can guard them against the other people's otherness. Indeed, it is the matter of relationship works between the individuals, communities, and nations. Such an idea of selfhood is affirmed by Bakhtin's idea or theory of Dialogism, and Architectonic Selfhood or Tripartite Model of psyche. The aim of this thesis is to verify a close relationship between the ideas of Bakhtin and Morrison. It analyzes the characters in terms of Bakhtin's theories.

The Review of Literature

Toni Morrison and her novels have caught the eyes of large numbers of her contemporary literary critics. One useful point is the rather new look the writers have hold on the much-debated "Black Beauty", another thing is the variety and range of different approached from which Morrison has been regarded. Contributions cover all the key texts, and discuss Morrison's writing in a variety of critical contexts, such as Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Cultural Studies, Cultural Materialism, to name just a few. For instance, the psychological critics have focused on the study of the inferiority and superiority complexes encrypted in the characters psyche of *The Bluest Eye* and have been able to cast lights on some revolving around the idea of Pecola's useless psychic quest or wandering for the blue eyes. Existentialistically studied, some others have examined Sartre's Ideas of Gaze and its dangers and problems brought to the individuals psychoanalytically. Moreover, some object-relation theorists-a clan of post-Freudian psychologists-such as Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, and Linden Peach, in her Reading Dialogic have put Kristeva theory of objection-a psychological state in which an individual hovers between being an object and a subject into practice

which eventually brings about his or her failure. Therefore, it requires a vast scope to provide good and multi-dimensional previews of literature to this thesis because of above-hunted patterns. But, quiet often, a few numbers of literary critics have concentrated on Bakhtin's Theory of Architectonics in appreciating Morrison's Architectonics, and this is what probably makes this thesis unique and it would be the source of some fresh ideas optimistically pondered.

Methodology and Approach

The writers represent somehow the period in which they live in their works. Toni Morrison like Richard Wright, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes,...is one of the novelists that problems of black people specially during the 1960s has a great influence on their works. Morrison's significant tendency has been to reveal the cultural, social, racial, gender, class and the other miscellaneous aspects of the black peoples' life in that era in America in her works. She represents some of these aspects in *The Bluest Eye*.

Having the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin as the basic theoretical frame-work for this study, that would be hard to define its methodology under any of the well-known literary approaches. The text of Mikhail Bakhtin with its unique style moves in many destructive circles refusing to yield to an academic categorization. His text mostly involve a direct engagement with numerous examples and historical excavations of social situations, and then mostly leaving them and going for others before making a clear-cut conclusion or categorization. Never the less, a serious scrutiny of these genealogies would finally result in deep insight into the modern social relations and situation of the modern man in general. The researcher, on the other hand, has tried to

do his best in giving an understandable overview of Bakhtin's philosophy regarding issues like Dialogism, Architectonic Selfhood, chronotope, carnivalism, to name just a few.

Also it has to be stated that the methodology this research has taken, like many other in humanities and literature, is based on library research. It has made use of library resources, and other research methods, such as interviews or questionnaires have been left out. The researcher has also surfed the web for more resources, i.e. e-books, but has not used the information published originally on the web.

The novel can be studied in the light of Bakhtin's theories, and some different Bakhtinian terms and ideas such as 'Architectonic Selfhood,' 'Carnivalism,' 'Chronotope,' 'Dialogism' could be applicable in *The Bluest Eye*. Concerning the idea of 'Dialogism', and 'Architectonic Self-hood' finally we can find out a cure to resolve some characters' the problem of communication and identity in this thesis.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Mikhail Bakhtin is undoubtedly one of the thinkers whose range of Psycho-philosophical ideas can never be condensed into one single thesis. He has written widely and also scatteredly. The present research however, just considers that part of Bakhtin's philosophy which is about "carnivalism", "chronotope", "Architectonic" and "Dialogism". This has exclusively been discussed in the second chapter called Dialogism and The Novelistic Hero. So it is clear that other parts of Bakhtin's philosophy have been excluded from the research.

Also Toni Morrison's much celebrated novel, *The Bluest Eye*, as evident in the selected bibliography, has been the subject of much interpretation and scholarly

debate. But since the aim of the researcher has been to find the individuals' problem of identity through the idea of relationship and communication in this work of art, so all the other interpretation of this novel done from many different critical approaches are deliberately overlooked.

Another delimitation the researcher would like to make is regarding the generalizations made about the author. Being as prolific writer as Toni Morrison, this research never claims to have done a comprehensive study on all her works and despite trying to briefly trace the problem of identity of some characters of the novel; it has to confine itself to the boundaries of two families of the novel: The Breedloves, and the MacTeers.

The Thesis Outline

The idea of relationship, communication, and identity starts with the exact study of the problems of a minor society, the blacks, in a major and dominant society, the whites, throughout the investigation of the novel. Therefore regards the ideas of Toni Morrison and her writing techniques, the novel, its characters, and also their characteristics are studied on the light of Bakhtin's divergent ideas and theories. During the thesis process, it deals with the affinities between Morrison's and Bakhtin's ideas. Deeply concerned with discovering some lines or traces of harmonies and affinities between Morrison's philosophy of Black Beauty and neighborhood and Bakhtin's ideology of Dialogism and Novelistic Hero is the principle anxiety of the thesis which I hope to show how the black people can find a way to get their identity in it.

In the introducing chapter of the thesis, it introduces the writer of the novel as an American Black lady novelist in twentieth century. It gives the reader some general information about some key sections such as statement of the problem, significant of the study, the review of literature, research questions, definition of key terms, and thesis outline.

In chapter two, the line of thought which leads to the information of the idea of relationship and problem of identity has been followed through Mikhail Bakhtin and mostly his Dialogism and Novelistic Hero. Other Bakhtin's books and essays, along with other authors have also been used occasionally as well. To fully understand that way in which Dialogism and Novelistic Hero can produce communication, and to notice how this can finally result in the problem of identity, the researcher has followed Bakhtin's philosophy and Morrison's believes on the idea of communication and relationship.

In chapter three and four, *The Problem of Identity* has been discussed from two relatively different points of views by Mikhail Bakhtin. First, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has been studied on the light of Bakhtin's Dialogism, second it has been also discussed on the light of his ideas of Novelistic Hero. The theoretical arguments of Bakhtin's ideology and approach are into practice, and eventually fresh ideas are going to be derived out of the research's main discussion and concerns.

In chapter five, the concluding one, the thesis is compiled together to come in terms with some rewards of its fundamental *I-and-the-other* argument, some dialogic notions, and the problem of identity and relationship and ultimately to introduce some new aspects worthy enough to be studied.

The Definition of Key Terms

Some of the key terms used in the theoretical approaches chosen by the researcher are as below.

Polyphony: Some novels are polyphonic. Bakhtin asserts that polyphony is an active creation in the consciousness of the author, the readers, and the characters, allowing for genuine surprises for all concerned. Because the truth requires a plurality of consciousnesses therefore, all of them are equal in creating it. Even, Bakhtin believes that there are many truths in a polyphonic novel, not one. Each character affirms his or her own truth. No truth is particularly certain, although maybe one of them be preferred by a character, a reader, or the author himself (Bressler 46).

Carnivalism: Another of Bakhtin key terms is carnivalism. It is a term coined by Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World*. It signifies the celebrations and ceremonies held in different parts of the world due to various occasions to do without all of the monarchies, authorities and centricities. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin traces the occurrence of the carnivalism in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance writers (Abrams 63). In those carnivals held in ancient times up to now, the ordinary, marginal, and lower class people were left free to decrown the laws, monolithic centers, and kings. As Michael Groden declares in his *Guide To literary Theory and Criticism*:

The people in carnivals know no shame, embarrassment. Furthermore, they feel quiet free and prepared to receive every new experience. They escape from any discipline and self-control. They just laugh. And their laughter subverts every hierarchies, certainties, or theories (90).

As carnival concentrizes the abstract in a culture, so Bakhtin believes that such a space is prepared in a novel as a polyphonic genre. The novel takes place in the public sphere of the middle class, just like a carnival. Both of them make power relative by addressing the middle class (Guerin 364).

Dialogism: It is a term which Bakhtin derived from the word, dialogue. Dialogue signifies a state in which an addresser talks with an addressee, never uttered without consciousness of relationship between them (Guerin 362). Dialogism connotes the two-sidedness of speech-acts among language speakers. It is quite obvious that a dialogue needs two sides to take place. Therefore, it is not a monologue. Bakhtin asserts that, all language is a dialogue in which a speaker and a listener form a relationship. He employs the term *heteroglossia*. As he believes, language is not only a mutual act but it is a social phenomenon. Even a person's speech, composed of languages from diverse social contexts, does not express a ready-made and autonomous individuality; instead, his or her character images in the course of the dialogue and is composed of languages from diverse social contexts. Each utterance, furthermore, whether in actual life or as represented in literature, owes its precise inflection and meaning to a number of attendant factors- the specific social situation in which it is spoken, the relation of the speaker to an actual or anticipated listener, and the relation of the utterance to the prior utterances to which it is, explicitly or implicitly, responded (Bressler 45). Michael Holquist in his *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* writes:

An utterance is always an answer. It is always an answer to another utterance that precedes it, and is therefore always conditional by, and in turn qualities, the prior utterance to a greater or lesser degree. Before it means any specific thing, an utterance expresses the general condition of each speaker's addressivity, the

situation of not only being preceded by a language system that is “always already there,” but preceded as well by all of existence, making it necessary for me to answer for the particular place I occupy (60).

The idea of dialogism is the central concept to Bakhtin’s critical theory.

Chronotope: Chronotope is one of the very few non-Russian words Bakhtin uses as part of his technical vocabulary, being recognizably Greek in Russian, as it is in English. What exactly is a chronotope? There is a crucial moment in which two factors of time and place are indispensable to collaborate, when an event happens to get to an analytical consequence. As Michael Holquist in his *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*, asserts:

The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and united. In this first, restricted use of the term, it refers to particular combinations of time and space as they have resulted in historically manifested narrative forms (109).

Bakhtin believes that there are some people who recognize these moments well when they are encountered with some specific events, scenes, and problems.

Architectonics: With respect to the idea of selfhood, this is for the first time that Bakhtin put forward this tripartite model of psyche. He believes that man’s tripartite Model of Psyche has got three major parts as following: I-for-myself, I-for-the other, and the- other-for-me. The first one is that aspect of man’s psyche in which man tries to study and analyze his own self and character within his own nature and existence based on his own personal knowledge. It is realm of potential, unrealized, and unformed dream. It is definitely internal and extending above all of the margins. It is constantly in change, and therefore it is not very reliable to take as a source to