

Research on Culture Goods and the Image of Mixed-blood in *The Bluest Eye*

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The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's maiden work, through which Morrison carried out independent thinking on the question of "What is beauty?" In *The Bluest Eye*, the image of mixed-blood is characterized as a self-satisfied beautiful girl or lady due to light skin color. However, Morrison shatters their proud aesthetic edifice through satirical techniques. Firstly, this paper starts with the analysis of Shirley Temple on the blue-and-white cup and Mary Jane on candy wrapper as culture goods, in order to reveal the aesthetic standards of the mainstream. Next, through close reading, this paper, taking the example of a high-yellow child Maureen Peal, and the graceful sugar-brown lady Geraldine, makes deep analysis on their sense of superiority and artistic characteristics, and aims to better understand Morrison's satirical techniques and interpretation of beauty.

Keywords: *The Bluest Eye*, culture goods, the image of mixed-blood, aesthetic standards, satire

Introduction

The Bluest Eye was written by Toni Morrison in 1969. In combination of the historical background of the time, "Black Power Movement" and "Black Arts Movement" proposed the radical reconstruction of Western cultural aesthetics and the slogan of "Black is Beautiful" (Jin & Li, 2017, p. 185). Morrison realized the danger of this kind of radical "Black Aesthetics" and imagined the thinking on racial beauty in *The Bluest Eye*. This novel tells the tragic story of a poor black girl named Pecola, who had always prayed for blue eyes to get rid of misfortunes. At present, in academic circles, many scholars have gone deeply into the image of Pecola, Mrs. Breedlove, Cholly, images of black women and black men. However, so far, the charming white girls as pictures on the packaging of culture goods and the image of mixed-blood have not been systematically analyzed yet. In view of this, it is necessary to explore how aesthetic standards of the mainstream erode the soul of black girls from the perspective of these marginalized images.

Mary Jane on Candy Wrapper

Just like Shirley Temple on the blue-and-white cup, little Mary Jane, as a picture on the yellow candy wrapper, is also a culture product representing the aesthetic standards of the mainstream. As for Shirley, when Pecola uses the blue-and-white cup, "She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face" (Morrison, 2007, p. 19). Just as milk nourishes her body, appreciating sweet

Shirley's face nourishes Pecola's soul in the same way. She is immersed in this kind of happiness. As a result, she drank three quarts of milk, which made Claudia's mother shocked and angry. Actually, Morrison skillfully employed satirical techniques here to reveal that Pecola has been deeply poisoned by the distorted aesthetic standards. When it comes to Mary Jane, Pecola's admiration for pretty white girls gets even more confusing. She has been enthusiastically praying for a year to have beautiful blue eyes. She believes that all the misfortunes are due to her unsatisfactory appearance. No one would notice this little black girl just like the unloved dandelions. In this situation, Mary Jane becomes her hope and good medicine for healing pains. Pecola's experience of buying Mary Jane candy in the store was not pleasant. The white immigrant store-keeper's disdainful gaze and detestation of touching her hand made Pecola ashamed and angry. As a result, she got heartbroken. "What to do before the tears come. She remembers the Mary Janes" (Morrison, 2007, p. 50). Mary Jane's pretty blue eyes, smiling white face and beautiful blond hair heals Pecola's broken heart. "To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (Morrison, 2007, p. 50). That's true, to a certain extent, being Mary Jane will keep her away from disdainful gaze. Even Pecola's biological mother loves white girls more than her daughter.

Shirley Temple or Mary Jane, Shirley Temples or Mary Janes in other places, they are all typical culture goods advertising the beauty of white girls or ladies. Sweet smiling face, snow white skin, pretty blue eyes and blond hair like a waterfall, they have such similar characteristics, which are also symbols of success, happiness and confidence. Clearly, the advertising effect works quite well on Pecola. Nevertheless, she is destined to be unable to change her skin color or eye color. In the harsh reality, her dream is like a water-bubble, which bursts at the slightest touch. In fact, Pecola is not the only black girl who wants to emulate white girls. In George S. Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), thanks to the hairstyle high technology of "Kink-No-More", black people's hair can be straightened. Besides, the technology of skin bleaching is also about to come out. "This not only provides unlimited niches for the business community, more importantly, it can meet the wishes of countless black people who hope to become 'white'" (Lin, 2015, p. 115). In a word, through omnipresent culture goods advocating for the beauty catering to the popular aesthetics, the black children will undoubtedly be subtly influenced.

"A High-yellow Dream Child"—Maureen Peal

Maureen Peal is a new student in Washington Irving school. She is a little beauty of mixed-blood. "She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her" (Morrison, 2007, p. 62). This is a highly satirical description of the interpersonal relationship in school. As a learning community, school is supposed to be a pure and sacred place for teaching students. However, this solemn treasure place turns to be a Vanity Fair. Students are not defined by their academic performance, but by their skin color and family background. Maureen Peal seems to be a highly beloved and respected queen. When she is not tripped by black boys in the hall, and when she is not stoned by the white boys, who will be the poor victim of bullying? The answer is obvious. Indeed, she has a glamorous appearance, "brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff" (Morrison, 2007, p. 62). Her clothes seem to be quite fashionable and most expensive. Even her lunch is so fastidious and exquisite. However, this little beauty of mixed-blood is completely superficial, and her

soul is always distorted. Firstly, she easily judges others by their appearance. For example, when Peal talked about their teacher in gym class, this little beauty said that, “Miss Erkmeister’s legs sure are bow. I bet she thinks they are cute” (Morrison, 2007, p. 68). Secondly, she employs verbal violence against her weak classmates in the most direct way. Peal called Pecola’s father “old black daddy” in front of the girls. And, she screamed loudly at Frieda, Claudia and Pecola in public, “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos” (Morrison, 2007, p. 73). As an extremely arrogant girl, Peal never treated them as friends. This little beauty is so wealthy but unwilling to buy Frieda and Claudia ice cream, although she knew very clearly that they also wanted to eat delicious ice cream but had no money. What’s more, Peal bought ice cream for Pecola because of a ulterior motive instead of her goodwill. She deliberately inquired into Pecola’s secret about her father, causing her embarrassment, without any regard for her inner feelings. On the contrary, as for Frieda and Claudia, they only had shoes as “a cheaper version of which we got only at Easter and which had disintegrated by the end of May” (Morrison, 2007, p. 62). Although they are not from a wealthy family and have no shiny clothes, their inner world is beautiful. When Pecola was bullied by black boys, they urgently rescued her from the predicament. At the end of the novel, when Pecola was pregnant with her father’s child, and when everyone sneered at Pecola, Frieda and Claudia gave up their cherished desire to buy a new bicycle, instead, they buried the money, two dollars, and planted the seeds. They tried their utmost to make a miracle and prayed for the baby in Pecola’s womb to survive. All in all, through the image of Maureen Peal, Morrison reveals that light skin color, first rate clothing, and favorable economic conditions can never be symbols of beauty, inner kindness and sincere feelings towards friends are much closer to beauty.

The Graceful Sugar-brown Lady—Geraldine

Geraldine is Junior’s mother. Before marriage, she was a thin brown girl who lived in “quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed” (Morrison, 2007, p. 82). Besides, she had pleasing physical beauty and paid attention to body fragrance. After marriage, she had her only son. As a mother, she didn’t allow her baby to play with black children. “She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers” (Morrison, 2007, p. 87). Ironically, this mother did not teach Junior life philosophy or behavioral etiquette as a student. Instead, she taught Junior how to avoid danger and trouble by staying away from black children. Geraldine’s words and deeds have had a subtle impact on her son. Junior liked playing games with black boys such as P. L. and Bay Boy. “Gradually he came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P. L. was good enough for him” (Morrison, 2007, p. 87). From idols to abandoned friends, it didn’t take too much time.

Thus it can be seen that Morrison used a magnifying glass to demonstrate how the awareness of skin color discrimination is transmitted from generation to generation within the original family. What’s more, this negative effect might become increasingly apparent. Little by little, Junior starts to bully girls enjoyably and is good at throwing stones at them. Moreover, he has learned the tricks of deceiving others. When he noticed Pecola, “a very black girl,” he lied to her that there were some kittens at his home, so she could take one if she wanted. This innocent black girl easily believed Junior and entered his house. The result is that Pecola’s face was scratched by cat claws and Junior framed her for killing the big black cat. In this case, Geraldine didn’t care at all about the truth of the matter. The little black girl in disheveled attire was just like a pesky fly in front of her. “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison, 2007, p. 92). Her meticulous care of elegance and beauty

shattered in this moment. However, after a while, Geraldine tried to regain her ladylike demeanor. From the visual angle of Pecola, “The pretty lady’s words made the cat fur move; the breath of each word parted the fur” (Morrison, 2007, p. 92). When creating character images, the author always pays attention to multi-level beauty. “The beauty of the human body is the one of a person’s emotional life, and when one’s words and deeds, voice and expression show his or her inner soul and spiritual beauty, it forms a kind of beauty of posture and charm” (Ye, 2009, p. 281). No matter how much Geraldine tried to maintain her elegance, due to her superior pride, malice and bullying towards the weak, she could never become a true lady.

Conclusion

Morrison once mentioned that, “Beauty was not something to behold; it was something one could do” (Morrison, 2007, p. xi). In *The Bluest Eye*, through culture goods of mainstream society and the images of mixed-blood, she demonstrated her understanding of beauty clearly. Shirley Temple or little Mary Jane, as a picture on the product, is merely a symbol representing Western aesthetics. They have no personality and spiritual core but become the weather vane of beauty. As for Maureen Peal, a so-called mixed-blood beauty, although she possesses the most in material terms, she is still so mean to her classmates and always assumes a posture of superiority. In addition, the graceful sugar-brown lady Geraldine, she personally implanted the evil consequence of skin color discrimination into her son’s heart. The elegant demeanor and glamorous appearance she strives to maintain cannot conceal the self-hatred and ugliness in her soul. In a word, they have seductive but fake beauty. More seriously, their beauty is just like Medusa, which petrifies and poisons poor Pecola and countless self-contemptuous black girls in real life.

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