

Ugliness essay

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Ugliness When a person defines another person as “ ugly,” one must wonder what validity their definition holds. Questions to ask would be why the particular person is ugly, what repulsive traits does he/she possess or contain to make him/her this way, or most commonly, what does he/she look like. The answer to that question, if asked in the 1940’s in Loraine, Ohio, would be “ she is ugly because she is black,” or even more appropriately, “ she is ugly because she is not white. ” Toni Morrison’s “ The Bluest Eye” is not the typical black American’s novel written in 1970 (or at all). It shows a different part of life and a different understanding than what is typically shown with a positive, triumphal, or most commonly, hopeful ending. Instead, it shows what can easily happen to a young girl growing up who has never had a sense of who she is, merely because she would have to be somebody else just to exist.

Blue eyes would make her a person. Until then, she is no one. Ugliness is a major contributor to this book, particularly because “ ugly” carries such a deeper understanding than the word itself. Pecola was made to feel ugly in many different ways. First, her family did little to help her self image. There was constant, violent fighting. There was little money and terrible living conditions. Through Claudia, Morrison writes, “ Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions.

They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration (Morrison 11). ” A lot of this “ ugliness” has to do with her

parents and their self-loathing transferring onto Pecola and her ideas and understanding of beauty. Her mother, Pauline, is tired and lonely.

Her ideals of beauty are formed by what she sees around her, particularly the movies she watches. As stated in “The Bluest Eye,” “In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap.... 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, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen (Morrison 144). Ultimately, the only way Pauline could feel worthwhile is to become a servant to the Fishers, a white family.

She could take pride in this, and the thought that she was worth more than the work she was doing did not even enter her mind. This ideal is white skin, a fair complexion, blue eyes, blonde hair, anything that is lighter than her is made beautiful. These images of “beauty” and her job are both ways to “curtail freedom (Kuenz).” Pecola’s father, Cholly, is weak and powerless, his self image is painfully low. In the end of this book he is dead, but not before initiating Pecola’s descent into madness by raping and impregnating her. Ugliness is defined by the many cultural images that media presents to Pecola and the other children, as well as the entire society. An example of this would be the dolls given to the girls for Christmas.

Although Claudia dismembers them, and at her youth, despises them, Pecola longs to look like them. She wants more than anything to have blue eyes. Claudia remarks, “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers

were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different (Morrison 38). " So, due to this mentality, the blue-eyed, pink skinned dolls were adored by her, because after all, that is all she truly wanted to be. Morrison writes in the voice of Claudia, " Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. Here,' they said, ' this is beautiful, and if you are on this day " worthy" you may have it (Morrison 21). "' Pecola is, like her mother, " a girl in awe of cinematic whiteness and transfixed in the glare of the white gaze (Baillie 24). " It is these cultural icons that help develop Pecola's belief, the belief that she is ugly.

Shirley Temple, who Pecola adores and wishes to be more than anyone else, is a staple of this idealism. Another example that Morrison uses throughout her book is the reference to the Dick and Jane stories. The Dick and Jane story opens the book and is repeated several times, each time becoming less and less tangible, the punctuation disappearing, the capitalization of proper nouns and the first words of sentences are lost. This seems to portray the stupidity of such unrealistic ideas. Besides that, it also shows what Pecola could never accomplish, what she would always pray for and long to have but never quite reach because she was just not beautiful and was far too weak. As the words become jibberish, it may be a reminder that childhood is not always innocent and nostalgic.

Childhood is not always accompanied with innocence, as Pecola would know first hand (Werrlein 69). There is much more than her parents to blame for

Pecola's dreadful outcome, but the entire society as a whole is to blame for her deep-rooted self hatred. A slice of society that she encountered was that shown to her by Maureen. Although Maureen herself was black, technically, because she had lighter skin and nicer clothes she was treated better than Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda. There was also Geraldine, a lighter toned black woman who had slightly different facial, less " ugly" features.

She taught her own son that there is a difference between her and " niggers," who are dirty and loud. Pecola knew she could not look like her, thus she was ugly. Geraldine calls Pecola a " nasty little black bitch (Morrison 75)" as though she were blacker, and thus, uglier, than herself. It was another example of how society ignored and rejected Pecola and another reason for Pecola to define herself as ugly. It was more of a silent understanding, she did not even have to say with her own words that she was ugly, she just knew.

Pecola is, however, a character that can represent the entire black community growing up in such conditions during similar times. In 1951, Kenneth and Mamie Clark performed an experiment in a black segregated school with both black and white baby dolls. They asked sixteen children to answer some questions. " Ten of the sixteen said they preferred the white dolls" and " eleven of the children referred to the black doll as ' bad,' while nine said the white doll was ' nice (Douglas 149). '" The experiment even showed that seven of the sixteen children saw themselves in the white baby doll more than the black. This is all some heavy evidence that self-hatred was being bred (Douglas 149).

Claudia speaks of Pecola and her baby saying, “ Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. ” It seems realistic to say that Pecola would never be happy with herself as a black, or “ ugly” girl. Until the end, when she slipped away into madness, she wanted so badly to be beautiful, to have blue eyes. When she finally believed she had, she was already lost. Just like her mother, she was only happy pretending she was somebody she truly was not, thus making it as though she really did not exist.

After all, all those people around her did not recognize her as equal. They ignored her and mistreated her, as though she was disgusting and horrifying, diseased even. Soaphead, the store owner, could see through her, as though she were not even human. Perhaps beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but what is to happen to those who never have a beholder to acknowledge their beauty?