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Development Of Female Identity In A Complex Racial And Social Framework In Toni Morrison's Novels: The Bluest Eye And Sula

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Abstract.

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison's first published novel that saw the light of day in 1970, is a very controversial piece of work, discussing the sensitive and disturbing topics of incest, racism and physical and mental abuse. It shows what kind of irreparable consequences the racial stereotypes and prejudices may have when they impact the psychological development of a young girl.

Sula, Morrison's second novel that was published in 1973, tells the story of the strong and unusual friendship that influenced the development of two very contrasting female personalities. It illustrates the importance of sisterhood, of women sticking together through the darkest of times and how that might be the solution to overcoming the complex racial and social circumstances surrounding the lives of African Americans.

In this paper I will attempt to analyse all the challenges that the women in these two novels had to face while trying to develop their identities. I will look into the complex racial and social framework that made their path to the development of identity difficult and eventually I will examine Morrison's possible suggestions of how to prevent the racial and social prejudices from affecting the women's lives in the future.

Keywords: African Americans, discrimination, female development, racism, stereotypes.

1. Introduction



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Toni Morrison, one of the most distinguished and award-winning American writers, originates from the North, but her grandfather, after having his farm taken away from him and having suffered great injustice by white people, moved the family. Many of her family members were victims of lynching and other forms of abuse. Racism, discrimination and the history of slavery coloured the lives of her closest family members and even her own pathway to adulthood. While growing up, Morrison was very well aware of the racial segregation, some instances of which she experienced while studying at a university in Washington, where she saw racially segregated busses and restaurants for the first time.

Morrison believed that art can be “unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time” (Bloom 2010: 13) which she proves with every single work she publishes as they are artistically magnificent but tackle important social and political topics at the same time. She insists that it is the task of the artists, writers included, to bring awareness to people worldwide and use the platform they have to draw attention to important causes. “A writer who has never shied away from confronting the harsh realities that undergrad and influence individual and collective history, Morrison credits the women in her family for encouraging a resolve to write about what others have too easily dismissed as the “unspeakable”.” (Bloom 2010: 14). The fact is that nothing that people have done and have been capable of doing should be considered unspeakable. Even the most painful and the most devastating events that shaped the past of the world should be addressed to and used as a lesson and a warning to future generations. In her remarkable and inspiring novels, Morrison writes about women, and they are her greatest inspiration.

Toni Morrison was the first African American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Being a woman and an African American, her path to literary success was not easy. Morrison decided to devote her extraordinary talent of storytelling to writing about African Americans and their various struggles in the society driven by hate, racism and discrimination. Her two novels that I chose to write about focus on the development of female identity in these harsh racial and social circumstances.

One may wonder why I decided to write about the development of female identity in complex racial and social context, when these horrible circumstances befell men as much as women. The truth is, while the slavery did have atrocious consequences, physical and psychological, to both men and women, just because of the nature of women, of their abilities



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to bring children into the world, and of the way women were used and abused, I believe they suffered more. Even many years after the slavery was abolished, women continued to suffer the consequences of being judged, criticized, and expected to act a certain way, all because of the colour of their skin.

The two Morrison's novels that I decided to write about are *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. I believe that it is not possible to discuss female identity in black women without taking the context into consideration. I chose to compare these two novels in terms of development of female identities in complex racial and social frameworks because in my opinion Morrison tackles very sensitive and overwhelming topics in both of them. These novels leave readers feeling astonished, shocked and with a desire to do what they are able to do in order to mend the injustices in the society. Morrison is a very courageous author, she deals with the themes that people are usually afraid to even envision, such as the case of a mother who decided to murder her own child, or a father who raped his own daughter. Even though these things definitely do happen in the world we live in, we consider them taboo topics and it appears that there is a silent consensus among the people not to discuss these controversial subjects. In this lies the power of Morrison's writing and this is the reason why her works do not seem to cease to amaze the readers all around the world. She writes about universal topics, and one does not need to be black to understand Morrison's literature. But one has to possess the feelings of empathy and compassion to be able to truly comprehend it.

2. The Bluest Eye

Morrison published this novel at a time of social and racial turmoil in the United States when the black people were fighting and standing up for their rights and when women started addressing the harrowing issues of rape and incest, both of these widely present in the black community.

The inspiration for this novel comes from Morrison's personal life and the conversation she had with a childhood friend who told her she no longer believed in God because her prayers to have blue eyes had never been answered. Toni commented on this: "I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled; and also about the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be



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somebody else, and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who were peripheral in other people's lives." (Bloom 2010: 17).

As a result of racist prejudices and stereotypes about what is considered to be beautiful, Pecola develops an inferiority complex, wishing to have blue eyes. She believes that only if she could have blue eyes, all of her problems would disappear. "It has 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 2016:44). She believed if she had blue eyes she would be pretty and then people would be nice to her and her family would love her. How terribly wrong this perception is! Especially for a young girl who has still not developed the sense of identity. The inferiority complex that Pecola suffers from, as probably many other black girls of her age do, also stems from the white people's insistence on manufacturing and buying white dolls with blue eyes and blonde hair that consequently all the children wanted to possess. These were considered as the perfect paragons of beauty, and everything that was different was thought of as ugly. Excerpts from Dick and Jane, the story that was used for children to learn how to read and write, in which no black children or families are portrayed, are present throughout the novel, giving children the idea that this is the perfect emblem of the family, and that is how the perfect family should look like, with the necessary white colour of the skin.

Pecola was often abused mentally by the community by being told that she was ugly. One of the major consequences of racism is the low self-esteem that especially affects black girls and women because the society imposes on them the wrong perception about what is beautiful and what is not. The ultimate consequences of these stereotypes and prejudices are Pecola's insanity and her hallucinations that she indeed got the blue eyes that she so desperately wished for. What additionally contributed to these mental disorders is the isolation Pecola felt, not only from the white people, but black people as well, who also judged her based on her physical appearance. „The Breedloves, the text emphasizes, are not intrinsically or aesthetically ugly; they are defined as ugly by the dominant culture with its white standards of beauty. “ (O'Reilly 2004: 52). Pecola is not only considered ugly by the society and community, but by her own family as well. The boys at school that bully Pecola are also black, and yet they call her black and ugly. Perhaps due to their own insecurities and because they hate their own colour of the skin they treat Pecola the way they do. The basis of discrimination also comes from the



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financial and social status, the difference between richer and poorer black people is highlighted in the novel. The hierarchy and stratification between races and between different levels of income and social status of black people are very prominent. Even the choice of words to describe black people is very deliberate; we can distinguish between Niggers and Colored people, the differentiation being explained in the novel as follows: “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud.” (Morrison 2016: 85). Therefore, the poor black people are discriminated against by both white people and rich black people. There are many instances of racism in the novel, one of the most prominent being the moment when Pauline was giving birth to Pecola, and she overheard the doctor saying to his students that black women do not feel pain while giving birth because they are like horses.

Pecola's dysfunctional family played a major part in her perception of herself as ugly which directly contributed to the development of her identity in the negative way. Pecola's father is an alcoholic and the core of his violent and abusive behaviour could be found in his upbringing as his parents abandoned him when he was a baby. His first sexual experience was observed by two white people, which left him traumatised and possibly influenced his becoming an aggressive person who was beating up his wife and who raped his daughter. Cholly redirects his frustration to others. He has an inferiority complex, he has no clear distinction between love and violence and he has to take out his aggression on those weaker than him. “Pecola is a casualty of the malignant love of her father, the failures of her mother, the disinterest of her community, and a culture that defines her as disposable, insignificant, and ugly.” (Gillespie 2008: 52). Morrison chose an interesting narrative technique – she described the incest and the rape from the point of view of the person who did it. This does not in any way justify his actions but it does give us more understanding of why he would do such a horrendous act. Pauline, Pecola's mother keeps on staying in an unhealthy marriage even though she herself is abused and her children are suffering major consequences from being a part of such a destructive family. “Pauline takes on rather than resists the identity assigned to her by the dominant culture.” (O'Reilly 2004: 52). She behaves in the exact way that white and high-class black people expect her to, she embraces the ugliness assigned to her family and she neglects them. “So when her child is born, and it is both black and female, Pauline sees it as she herself was seen while in labor as undesirable, irrelevant, and unimportant.” (O'Reilly 2004: 53). Pauline gives the motherly love and attention to the girl for whose family she works,



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as she represents the beautiful and ideal daughter she always wished for. In this respect we see that Pauline is very much capable of providing support, love and care, but she simply chooses not to do it for her children. "You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." (Morrison 2016: 37). The society characterized them as ugly because they were black and dysfunctional as a family, but they took it upon themselves and accepted it. Even when Pecola is bullied she never fights back as if she accepts these insults as true.

In contrast, Claudia who comes from a loving caring family has high self-esteem, not longing for blue eyes or white dolls. She actually destroyed the white dolls as a sign of hatred she felt for white people. Claudia does not understand why these dolls are considered so beautiful, that she breaks down her doll trying to find where the beauty is. Why were there no black dolls with dark eyes? If there were dolls like that then the girls would know something different could also be beautiful. Perhaps Claudia was able to develop her own opinion and not get influenced by accepted standards of beauty because of the family she was raised in, that made her feel loved and beautiful the way she was. We can notice a crucial difference between Pecola's and Claudia and Frieda's father, the first one rapes his daughter, and the second one almost kills a man who is inappropriate with his daughter. Despite the poverty of Claudia and Frieda's family, we notice the normal family relations, the sisters' bond, the caring mother and the protective father.

"What Pecola lacks most decidedly is a sense of self." (Duvall 2000: 55). Pecola is unable to develop a healthy and confident sense of identity due to many complex reasons. Pecola is a child, a black female, with unsupportive family who do not show love towards her and the judgmental stereotypical society. Could the situation have been different if some of these factors had been different? The example of Claudia and Frieda show that having a loving and caring parents and siblings makes a significant difference. "There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for



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sustained periods of time.” (Morrison 2016: vii). Toni Morrison’s foreword clearly indicates that this story is universal, the search for identity and figuring out who we are and what is our place in this world is not unique, and most people can relate to it. However, she shows how far this feeling of not belonging and being excluded can take an insecure, young, female child who has no one to turn to.

How come that the standards of beauty and physical looks almost always apply to women and not men? We keep witnessing the pressure of the society through media for women to look a certain way and predetermined concepts of what is considered beautiful and what is not. So many women keep being pressured into changing their physical appearance through aesthetic surgeries. It might seem far-fetched, but it seems to me that Morrison also has a note of this trend suggested in her novel.

Morrison concludes: “Many readers remain touched but not moved.” (Morrison 2016: 207). She does not want the readers to feel sympathy for Pecola, she wants them to realize that the only thing ugly about the black people is the history they had to go through and experiences they had to overcome. We often discriminate against people on various bases: colour of the skin, religion, nationality, sex, and we do not seem to notice the devastating and harmful consequences these prejudice may have on the development of identity of children, and especially female ones.

3. Sula

Sula, published in 1973, follows the development of identities of two best friends Nel and Sula, who could not be more different from each other but whose friendship and bond seem to be stronger than those of family members. By depicting the lives of two black girls, very contrasting in their character traits and the lives they choose to live, Morrison is again attracting attention from the readers, taking her writing to the next level by describing a black girl who voluntarily sleeps with white men and a mother who murdered her own child. Her comment about her writing is: “I don’t want to give my readers something to swallow, I want to give them something to feel and think about...” (Bloom 1999: 5). This is true of all the Morrison’s work, all of the pieces of art she created, apart from being beautifully written, carry a powerful message and a call to action. “As the novel spans the destructive years from World War I



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through the Depression to the threshold of World War II in 1941 to 1965 and the civil rights movement, it becomes an elegy for the victims of war, poverty and racial violence.” (Bloom 1999: 184). The novel recounts all the challenges facing the development of female identities in the period of racial discrimination and social hierarchy battles.

Nel and Sula were brought up in completely different families, which directly influenced the development of their identities. Nel's mother is conventional and rigid, and wants the stable life for her daughter, the same one that she has had. On the other hand, Sula's family is eccentric: “The trinity of women who share the spotlight in *Sula* – Eva, Hannah and Sula – have much in common with this world view. Their breaks from expected codes of behaviour also enable them to transcend the usual depictions of black women in African-American literature, thereby debunking numerous stereotypes and myths.” (Bloom 1999: 121). The girls develop opposite personalities and they go on to live the lives they were expected to lead – Nel ends up in a traditional marriage with children and Sula is independent and lives her life the way she wants it to, without following any traditions or societal expectations. “According to most of the residents of the Bottom, the worst thing a black woman like Sula can do is to sleep with a white man.” (Bloom 1999: 6). In the world where black people vividly remember the atrocities dating from the period of slavery and where the hatred between the races is very much present, black community condemns Sula for voluntarily sleeping with white men, as black women were raped and abused by them for such a long period of time. In their eyes, this sin is unforgivable and cannot be justified. In many ways Sula shows the characteristics which are typical of men. She does not want to settle for what a black woman is expected to be and do. The question remains – why is Sula so ostracized? Is it because she is different or because she is a woman acting like a man? Morrison says about Sula: “She really behaves like a man. She picks up a man, drops a man, the same way a man picks up a woman, drops a woman. And that's her thing. She's masculine in that sense. She's adventuresome, she trusts herself, she's not scared, she really ain't scared. And she is curious and will leave and try anything. So that quality of masculinity – and I mean this in the pure sense – in a woman at that time is outrage, total outrage.” (Duvall 2000: 60). To be perfectly honest, even in the modern times that we live in, a woman behaving like Sula would be the talk of the town, criticized and infamous. Perhaps Sula also did some things out of spite since at times she felt unsupported by her own family, especially when she overheard her mother saying: “You love



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her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference." (Morrison 2002: 57). In this way her mother emphasizes she loves Sula because she has to and she is her daughter but not because she wants to. On the other hand, Nel is a typical woman of the time and she survives it all but in the end she is not happy and cannot say that she led a content life. Sula was defying all the traditions, she died young but lived a fulfilled life full of excitement and adventures. And she was probably much happier than Nel. Sula's personality is very strong and dominant, she is self-confident and believes she leads a life that she created on her own terms. She did not long for marriage and children, her explanation being: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself." (Morrison 2002: 92).

However, the friendship that these two women built is deep and strong and continues despite their differences. "Out of their awareness that their lives, as black females, are restricted by their community and by the outer society, Nel and Sula are drawn to each other. As only-girl children, each takes the other as sister, sharing each other's dreams of freedom and excitement." (Bloom 1999: 34). The bond and sisterhood between women is so strong and so significant to them because of the conditions they lived in, both of them felt they were not understood and they could not freely express themselves, one of them feeling the need to conform to the traditional expectations and the other one defying them in the most conspicuous way, but both of them feeling fully understood and supported only by each other. "Sula is representative of an independent, strong, and proud black woman; however, her pride and her independence seem to leave her without enough empathy for other people and cause her ostracism from the community. A compromise between Nel's dependence and Sula's independence seems to be the novel's suggestion for achieving the right balance for a happy and full life." (Gillespie 2008: 206).

The seemingly unbreakable friendship fell apart when Nel's husband Jude cheated on Nel with Sula. For Nel, this betrayal was unforgivable: "That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for." (Morrison 2002: 110). To Nel, losing a husband and losing a best friend were the losses that hurt the same. On the other hand, Sula did not do it to purposefully hurt Nel. In her mind, she and Nel always shared everything, there was never possessiveness in their relationship, so she thought it natural that they could share Nel's husband. "Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her. Now she wanted everything, all because of *that*. Nel



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was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew, who had seen as she had the slant of life that made it possible to stretch it to its limits. Now Nel was one of *them*.” (Morrison 2002: 119). Both of them were disappointed at each other, but for different reasons, they saw their friendship differently. At the end of the novel we find out that even Nel has not fully supported Sula's lifestyle: “You can't do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, talking what you want, leaving what you don't.” (Morrison 2002: 142). Her view of Sula's life was the same like the one the black community had. She disapproved of it, but it seems that it only started bothering her when it affected her own life. It took many years of not speaking to each other and Sula's death for Nel to finally forgive Sula and admit to herself: ““All that time, all that time I thought I was missing Jude.” And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. “We was girls together,” she said as though explaining something. “O Lord, Sula,” she cried, “girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.” It was a fine cry – loud and long – but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.” (Morrison 2002: 174). She finally understood that her friendship with Sula was more important than her marriage, but as it usually happens in life, it was too little too late to change anything.

The novel challenges the traditional opposition between good and evil and lines between them are blurred. Is Sula a good or a bad person? She is independent and free from all social constraints but she breaks an unwritten moral rule by getting involved with married men. So can we really define her and limit her identity to these definitions? Nel could also be described as a bad person for following the traditions blindly and never questioning them. And even though she led a religious, righteous life, Nel was not awarded in any way for her kindness and good heart. ““ I was good to you, Sula, why don't that matter?” “It matters, Nel, but only to you. Not to anybody else. Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody. Risky. You don't get nothing for it.” (Morrison 2002:144). “*Sula* insists that readers put aside conventional expectations to enter a fictional world deliberately inverted to reveal a complex reality; a world in which evil may be a necessary good, where good may be exposed for its inherent evil, where murder and self-mutilation become acts of love, and where simple answers to ordinary human problems do not exist.” (Bloom 1999: 149). Sula accomplished her identity by not conforming to traditions and expectations. She did not marry or have children and she put her grandmother in a nursing home, she has done all these things that are considered



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inhuman in black culture. And she believes for herself, just like Nel does, that she is a good person. “” How you know?” Sula asked. “Know what?” Nel still wouldn't look at her. “About who was good. How you know it was you?” “What you mean?” “I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me.”” (Morrison 2002: 146). Sula and Nel's characteristics together would probably account for one perfect woman, one fully formed and satisfied identity that could meet both the societal expectations and personal longings and wishes.

The men in the novel influence the development of female identities in a major way. It seems that the most of them fall short in the eyes of the women, they abandon them and leave them alone to take care of the household and children. Eva's husband left her, Jude left Nel, Ajax left Sula. It seems that all men in Eva's life disappointed her, her husband when he abandoned her and the children and her son when he started using drugs. The conclusion may be drawn that all the men in *Sula* do not have a developed sense of identity, either because of the war, racism, social status etc. Jude for example was a victim of discrimination, as he was denied the job he wanted badly due to racism. What he was looking for in a woman was empathy, comfort and support in the hope that this can substitute for being racially discriminated against. Ajax felt pressured by the traditional expectations and he did everything he can to avoid them. Jude was a victim of warfare.

As is typical for Morrison's writing, she includes the unthinkable and unimaginable in the novel – a mother murdering her own child. Eva sacrificed a lot for her children, she even lost her leg in an attempt to provide a good life for them. Even though it is difficult to even try to find the justification for what she did, we can understand why she would be upset and disappointed that the child she sacrificed so much for, used drugs and wasted his life. It is in her disappointment that we can look for reasons why she decided to kill him. All her actions were driven by the unconditional love she feels for her children. One day Hannah asked Eva if she ever loved her children: ““I know you fed us and all. I was talkin' bout something else. Like. Like. Playin' with us, did you ever, you know, play with us?” “Play? Wasn't nobody playin' in 1895. Just 'cause you got it good now you think it was always this good? 1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies.”” (Morrison 2002: 68). The perception of what love is being different because of the unfavourable circumstances. To Eva, the ultimate evidence of her love is her personal sacrifice of losing her leg in order to provide financial means for her children, while her children only want their mother to play with them



and are probably not aware of all the difficulties their mother had to go through to keep their family together. The circumstances determined Eva's identity as a mother and as a wife.

4. The common themes in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*

Morison tackles very unusual topics which are not commonly discussed in both novels. As she notes: "Friendship between women is special, different, and has never been depicted as the major focus of a novel before *Sula*. Nobody ever talked about friendship between women unless it was homosexual, and there is no homosexuality in *Sula*." (Tally 2007: 21). Both novels discuss the development of female identities in complex social and racial frameworks, and somehow all the female protagonists do not seem to experience the happy ending. Pecola's identity is suppressed by the failure of the overall society to accept her as being different and find the beauty in her uniqueness. Nel's identity, due to the pressure of the controlling mother and the need to follow the traditional values, does not really develop at all since she ends up doing whatever is expected from her. Sula, probably the character with the strongest sense of identity, manages to go through life the way she desires, but she is constantly being scrutinized and judged.

Motherhood seems to be the defining parameter in all the female characters' development. Pecola is irreparably damaged by the negligence of her parents. Sula and Nel feel the obligation/freedom to live the lives they do because of their upbringing.

Death and violence have the utmost importance in developing the women's identities. Pecola's father raped her because of which she slipped into insanity. The reality of what had happened to her was so painful to live with that she had to escape into madness. The death of the boy that Sula and Nel accidentally killed strengthened their friendship and made them more mature, obliging them to keep the secret between them for the rest of their lives.

Freedom is a very important concept in black culture and history. Even though black people are officially free and granted the same and equal rights and liberties as white people, the female characters in the novels are either not free in metaphorical sense or are frowned upon for using their freedom to determine their own lifestyle.

The men in the novel are victims of social and racial circumstances and prove to have weak personalities with inability to overcome the difficulties they have faced in life. Pecola's



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father took out his personal childhood traumas on his child. In *Sula* all the major male characters have the common habit – of abandoning their women.

The significance of community has been prominent in the novels. Because Pecola was isolated and excluded from the community, her life ended tragically. On the other hand, Sula and Nel cherished their sisterhood while growing up which contributed to the development of their identities, as they felt supported and understood by each other. Because of the strength of their friendship, it was easy for Sula to neglect the community's judgemental behaviour towards her.

5. Conclusion

Being black in the world where racism and discrimination have still not been eradicated is not easy. Being a woman in the world where we still have to insist on equal rights and treatment of men and women worldwide is not easy either. But being both black and a woman in those complex racial and social circumstances is extremely challenging and that is exactly what Morrison is trying to depict in her novels.

“The choices we make are not gratuitous; they are most often political, emerging from an ideology that we are not even, not necessarily anyway, aware of. If there is one thing that Toni Morrison – author, playwright, librettist, lyricist, Nobel Prize winner, social and literary critic – has taught us, it is that we are all responsible for those choices, and ignorance is not a lawful excuse for committing an infraction: for Morrison “...as far as the future is concerned, when one writes, as critic or as author, all necks are on the line.”” (Tally 2007: 1). Just because we do not possess the knowledge about the ongoing presence of racial discrimination in the world or just because we are perhaps not directly affected by it, does not mean that we should turn the blind eye to this burning issue. All the major conflicts in the modern world are based on some sort of discrimination, whether it is racial, religious, sexist, etc. Because of the people's inability to accept and cherish the diversity, the wars break out, the terrorist attacks happen, the hatred between people awakens.

Morrison writes about unimaginable, unspeakable, unfathomable things, things that make us cringe when we read the newspapers or hear about them on television. However, the reason behind her choice of topics is the provocation of action. “Tactically, she employs her



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novels as vehicles to incite action. They are, in fact, social and political treatises; not simply aesthetically pleasing, but, in making a social statement, they are didactic because she understands the urgency of arriving at a solution for the African crisis.” (Drummond Mbalia 2004: 25). Morrison is acutely aware that the problems surrounding the African Americans such as racism, discrimination and the psychological consequences of slavery are still present. She also knows that people worldwide who are not affected by these issues are poorly informed about them and do not know that there are many women like Pecola, Sula and Nel, whose psychological development is being impaired due to the existence of these concepts. Toni Morrison explained why she wrote *The Bluest Eye*: “Because I know that this is a terrible story about things one would rather not know anything about.” (Bloom 1999: 220). Reading Morrison means obtaining pieces of information, receiving shocking and disturbing details regarding racial and social injustices and their consequences, but it also means the obligation. The obligation to learn from her stories and work towards fixing the core of the problem.

When it comes to the development of female identity, Morrison makes us wonder: what are the accepted standards of beauty and why is the society trying to make them specific? Why do people, and especially women try to fit in? In *The Bluest Eye*, these standards of beauty stem from racism and discrimination, but even today women feel pressured to fit the specified standards and therefore undergo various plastic surgeries. Why can't we make the inner beauty as a standard? Why can't we value people based on their education and good manners? Morrison also makes us question why women are constantly being scrutinized and judged for their actions. Why is it socially acceptable for men to live their lives as they please, without the need to explain themselves? Why are men who choose not to marry called bachelors, the word that obviously carries positive connotation, while women who do not get married are called spinsters and are frowned upon and pitied by the society? Morrison, by writing about women and the challenges they face in the development of their identities, shows us that we have not actually achieved so much in terms of feminism as it would be expected in the 21st century.

In her novels: “Morrison may be talking about the past, but she is speaking to the present.” (Tally 2007: 3). She is addressing the issues that are still present, that still affect women all around the world and she hopes that her readers will take tragedies from her novels



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as warnings and will do their part in combating racial and social prejudices and not allow the mistakes from the past to be repeated.

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