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La structure d'un article scientifique en lettres et sciences humaines se présente comme suit :

Pour un article qui est une contribution théorique et fondamentale : Titre, Prénom et Nom de l'auteur, Institution d'attache, adresse électronique, Résumé en Français, Mots clés, Abstract, Key words, Introduction (justification du thème, problématique, hypothèses/objectifs scientifiques, approche), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

- Pour un article qui résulte d'une recherche de terrain : Titre, Prénom et Nom de l'auteur, Institution d'attache, adresse électronique, Résumé en Français, Mots clés, Abstract, Key words, Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

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Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998, p. 223), est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupé du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont fait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation socio-historique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

3.6. Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

3.7. Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique sont présentés comme suit :

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Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Éditeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2^{de} éd.).

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**THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF BLACKS' REJECTION AND
VICTIMIZATION IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE***

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Résumé : *L'exploration de The Bluest Eye de Toni Morrison nous a permis de découvrir comment les Noirs sont non seulement rejetés et victimisés par leurs homologues américains blancs, mais davantage par une partie de leur sang. L'influence de l'idéologie occidentale qui restreint les normes de beauté à la peau blanche et aux yeux bleus provoque la dislocation de l'unité parmi les Noirs et exhorte beaucoup d'entre eux à trahir leur tradition et leurs coutumes. Tel est le cas de Pecola qui veut changer ses yeux du noir au bleu comme forme d'intégration aux États-Unis. Ce fait, ajouté aux humiliations, coups, insultes et abus sexuels établit l'interaction entre histoire et fiction dans le récit de Toni Morrison.*

Mots clés : Noirs, Blancs, Histoire, Fiction, Rejeté, Victimisé, États-Unis.

Abstract: *The exploration of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye has helped us discover how Blacks are not only rejected and victimized by their white American counterparts, but more by some of their blood. The influence of the Western ideology that restricts the beauty standards to white skin and blue eyes causes the dislocation of unity among Blacks and urges many of them to betray their tradition and customs. Such is the case of Pecola who wants to change her eyes from black to blue as a form of integration in the United States. This fact, added to humiliations, beatings, insults, and sexual abuses establishes the interplay between history and fiction in Toni Morrison's narrative.*

Key words: Blacks, Whites, History, Fiction, Rejected, Victimized, The

United States.

Introduction

In the context of slavery, Toni Morrison reconstructs the terms “rejection” and “victimization” as all forms of mistreatments inflicted on Blacks by both, Whites and some Blacks who are deeply influenced by the Western culture. Published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye* is the starting point of Toni Morrison’s literary career, relating the curse of being born black in the American society. The novel tells of one of its central characters, Pecola, a 14-year-old black American girl who is victim of racial discrimination and rejection because of her dark skin. Growing up in a society where beauty means whiteness, Pecola wants to become white and have blue eyes like those of Shirley Temple. This desire is what undoubtedly pushed the author to entitle her book “The Bluest Eye”, which symbolizes beauty and acceptance in the American society.

The choice of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* for this paper is justified by the author’s representation of “beauty” as a symbol of integration, and “ugliness” as a source of rejection. These two aspects of acceptance and rejection contextualized by the author have attracted our attention. This paper is not maybe the first work to be realized on this narrative. For, Calvin Herton who first came across it, classifies the author as “an integrationist writer because of the theme of racism developed in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*”.¹

Our main interest in this study is especially linked to what this novel owes to Blacks’ experience of life in the American society, and how much this experience may have influenced the author’s imagination. This means that there is a kind of interplay between fiction and history in Morrison’s narrative that urges us to put the following question: Is Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* the representation of Blacks’ rejection and victimization in the United States? To answer this interrogation, we hypothesize that Blacks’ rejection and victimization evidenced through humiliations, mockeries, insults, and sexual abuses are part of their experience in Toni Morrison’s fiction.

Being concerned with a literary text linked to the American history, we find it important to resort to the New historicism. For, this approach consists in showing the relationship between the text and history. It shows how a given writer integrates history within a work of fiction, as Foster states: “In the novel, we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life” (Foster, 1962, p. 70). Foster’s view here suggests that, as a literary genre, the novel raises some historical incidents which occurred in the author’s community.

Two main points are discussed in this paper. The first is related to the examination of black characters' rejection because of their blackness. The second tackles their victimization through humiliations, mockeries, insults, and sexual abuses.

1. Black characters' rejection

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, black characters' rejection is embodied by Pecola, a female black character who never feels loved by her fellows because of her blackness and ugliness. These two wrongful qualities attributed to this character put her in the margin of the mainstream American society. Her classmates' indignation "black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnecked. Black e mo black e moyadadd sleeps necked. Black e mo..." (TBE, p. 65), attests of her rejection because of her black color. The word "black" in this shouting evidences her nothingness in a country that she believes is also hers, but ends up mistreating her due to her position of a second zone citizen. The mockery endured by this female character is so intense that the narrator insists on accounting for it through the following song:

Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps necked.
Stch ta tastch ta ta
Stach ta tatatata (TBE, id.,).

This song shouts Pecola's rejection not only at school, but also in society where she is laughed at even by her own folks. Unable to overcome such a humiliation from her classmates, Pecola starts crying: "She had dropped her notebook, and covered her eyes with her hands" (TBE, p. 66). This humiliation illustrates black Americans' treatment in the American society. This treatment, the author argues, is the cause that urges them to seek refuge in God, as Pecola begs Him to help her get rid of this shameful moment: "Please, God, she whispered into the palm of her hand. Please make me disappear. She squeezed her eyes shut" (TBE, p. 45). The reinforcement of Whites' hatred for this black character is just a way to tell the reader that in the United States, all that is black is bad and ugly, and that the white color symbolizes not only beauty, but also perfection and acceptance. It is indeed the need to be accepted as a full American citizen that pushes Pecola to change her dark complexion into white. The only difficulty she encounters is how to change her eyes viewed as the essential condition to be accepted in the United States:

Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally, it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight eyes were left. They were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So, what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces (*TBE*, id.,).

It is exactly because of her ugliness that Pecola wants to reach the white beauty ignoring her incapacity to change the color of her eyes. The novel reads that this female character was born in a hostile society which regards the "black color" as an obstacle to the integration of all black Americans. The image of blue eyes reconstructed by the author is just an illustration of forms of Blacks' rejection that Whites think, cannot have "blue eyes", because the color of eyes goes along with the color of skin. Unfortunately, Pecola who is willing to have such eyes prays God for that, as the following passage tells evidence: "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time" (*TBE*, p. 46). Evidently, Pecola is not excluded from the mainstream American society because of the content of her knowledge, but because of the color of her skin. The lack of blue eyes which is the cause of her rejection is just a pretext Whites find to get definitely rid of Blacks, because they know that the latter can never change their black eyes into blue ones. But, Pecola who is ignorant of this Whites' strategy still blames her physical appearance: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (*TBE*, p. 45). On the same page, the author continues to highlight that "she was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk".

Pecola's rejection by her classmates is similar to that of her mother Pauline who, after breaking her leg, feels rejected by her family and friends. This means that both, mother and her daughter are victims of a social hatred which is for the author, a brake to Blacks' integration. But what is sad for Pecola is that she is not only rejected by the society, but also by her own mother who argues: "Anyways, the baby come. Big old healthy thing. She

looked different from what I thought” (*TBE*, p. 125). This wrongful consideration of a mother for her own daughter attests of the impact of the Western ideology over black Americans, because according to the Western world, “white” symbolizes everything perfect and acceptable. The notion of “blue eyes” the reader is introduced to is one of the conditions of acceptance imposed to Blacks by their white counterparts. But this condition which cannot be fulfilled is to some extent a form of authoritative exclusion of the black race. The author continues to show Pecola’s rejection by both, teacher and classmates who even do not dare to look at her in the classroom:

The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always. But what about Marie Apollinaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino. Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her and called on her only when everyone was required to respond (*TBE*, id.,).

As Pecola still considers her dark eyes as the cause of her rejection in the American society, she decides then not to go to school any longer if only her eyes are not turned blue: “I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me (...). My eyes (...). I want them blue” (*TBE*, p. 174). This quotation suggests that Pecola does not look at studies as a process of integration, but her eyes. That is why she is determined to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. The little female black character becomes very disappointed the day she learns from a black man that there is no one on earth capable of changing the color of her eyes. The only powerful person he knows, as he argues, is God:

I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. I work only through the Lord. He sometimes uses me to help people. All I can do is offer myself to Him as the instrument through which He works. If He wants your wish granted, He will do it (*TBE*, id.,).

The question of rejection endured by black female characters because of their blackness and ugliness in the United States is so excessive that the narrator keeps on accounting for it through three neighbors of Pecola who, knowing that they are often mocked and rejected, use sexuality as a means of having authority over men. The narrator’s account for this reality is evident in the passage in which she tells of Pecola’s encounter with the three prostitutes, who trying to urge her become a prostitute like them, argue that

her little legs are as capable as theirs in bed:

The women were friendly, but slow to begin talk. Pecola always took the initiative with Marie, who, once inspired, was difficult to stop. How come you got so many boyfriends, Miss Marie? (...) I ain't seen a boy since nineteen and twenty-seven. (...) You mean that's when you got old, China said. I ain't never got old. Just fat. Same thing. You think 'cause you skinny, folks think you young? You'd make a haint buy a girdle. And you look like the north side of a southbound mule. All I know is, them bandy little legs of yours is every bit as old as mine (*TBE*, p. 52).

Pecola's neighbors' involvement in sex activity is not simply a way to make money, but more to appear visible in the American society that still considers them as invisible people. They believe that if a white man comes and asks for sex to them, they will feel accepted. This means that if Whites consider them as objects of pleasure, they however, think of themselves as visible and accepted citizens of the United States. In this context, black characters think that Whites will no longer impose them to have "blue eyes". Perhaps, this perception of Blacks' ugliness because of their black color and the lack of blue eyes will be eradicated from the American society. But Pecola does not share such a view point and thinks that the best way to integrate the American society is to change one's dark eyes into blue ones. The narrator who often witnesses how this character appreciates Shirley's blue eyes argues: "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" (*TBE*, p. 46). One understands that Pecola's abstinence of sexual relationships because of the lack of blue eyes symbolizes her determination to achieve her goal. What Toni Morrison shows through this character's determination is black women's struggle for social achievement. This means that the problem of "blue eyes" raised by the author is just a metaphor to show how long black women's struggle for integration has been in the United States. The author for example underlines how children and parents hate one another, as it is the case of Paola, another black female character who hates her mother because of her darkness: "The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother because she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral. It was really sad. Everybody cries in it" (*TBE*, p. 67).

Looking at the way Toni Morrison dramatizes hatred observed between

Paola and her mother, one agrees with MalcolmX who says that “the white man has taught the black people in this country to hate themselves as inferior people, to hate each other, to be divided against each other” (Malcolm X, 1963, p. 22). From this view point, it goes without any doubt that Paola in the *Bluest Eyes* does not only hate her mother, but also herself, her community, and her race to which she stands as a traitor. The consequences of those wrong Whites’ teachings can be observed through a female character in the novel who already thinks of the black race as an inferior, dirty, and ineligible race in the white community:

White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud (*TBE*, p. 87).

One observes that the prohibition made to white children to play with black ones is not only a way to teach white kids to hate black kids, but more generally to exclude them from the American society. This Whites’ indifference even pushes many black Americans to cry for their new born babies, which they think, will be victims of racial violence. Such a cry is not far from Willie and Enerstine in *Mama Flora’s Family* who complain in these terms: “They were beautiful, those tiny babies, but he wept because the indignities and injustices the color of their skin would bring to them, and from which he could protect them” (Haley, 1999, p. 256). This utterance attests of Blacks’ despair and worries about their children who have come to a world where their future is questionable because of racism extolled by the white man. Such a description of Blacks’ experience on the American soil contextualized by Toni Morrison and Alex Haley shows the intertextuality between *The Bluest Eye* and *Mama Flora’s Family*.

The experience of Blacks in the white man’s world that the author discusses in her novel cannot be limited to the mere depiction of the black characters’ rejection. The reader can also sense how this need for historical realism leads the writer to denounce their victimization in her work of fiction.

2. Black characters’ victimization

In Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* black characters’ victimization is depicted in different ways. While some characters are insulted, punished, beaten, and discriminated for the simple reason that they are black and ugly,

others bear children fathered by their own fathers through rapes. This is the case of Pecola's rape by her own father, and whose pregnancy is known by the community, wishing the death of the baby:

We listened for the one who would say, poor little girl, or poor baby, but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been (...). I thought about the baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin (*TBE*, p. 190).

In this passage, the notion of victimization appears not only through the baby that is doomed to die because of the sin made by its parents, but also through Pecola who, after being victim of rape from her father, supports the burden of bearing an unwilling pregnancy viewed as an abomination by the whole community. Toni Morrison's mention of such an act is a way to recall that apart from Blacks' victimization observed through Whites' abuses over them, some Blacks suffer in the United States because of their own black fellows' inhuman behaviors. What reinforces characters' desire to see the baby dead is their awareness about Pecola's ugliness. They think that as an ugly woman, she cannot give birth to a cute baby: "Can't help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground" (*TBE*, id.). The phrase "ought to be a law" shows that there is a prohibition given to two ugly individuals in the United States to have sex and give birth to babies for fear of crowding the country with too many black, dirty, and ugly people.

Pecola's sexual act with her father is regarded by the community as an insult to the traditional customs, and a shame for the black race. Her sisters feel shocked to see how she and her father have betrayed the ancestors' tradition and the custom of the black race which strongly prohibit a sexual act between a daughter and her father. This act undoubtedly sustains the Whites' view stating that all black people were savage, and that Africa where they are from is a jungle where the law of the strongest governs. One can see in the following passage how Pecola's sisters feel embarrassed for Pecola's shameful act:

Our astonishment was short-lived, for it gave way to a curious kind of defensive shame; we were embarrassed for Pecola, hurt for her, and finally we just felt sorry for her.

Our sorrow drove out all thoughts of the new bicycle. And I believe our sorrow was the more intense because nobody else seemed to share it. They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story (*TBE*, p. 190).

As it can be seen, if Pecola's sisters are shocked and embarrassed for her it is because they are aware of her being victim of mistreatments in their community because of her ugliness recognized by herself. They believe that her fate is going to be worse with such a pregnancy which is the fruit of her sexual intercourse with Cholly, her own father. This means that Pecola's victimization on the American soil is reinforced by her father who ends up destroying her virginity at the age of twenty-seven. Her life on the earth is put into questions by all people in their society, because, according to their belief, she cannot live as long as the new-born baby is alive. The narrator illustrates this aspect through the following dialogue:

Did you hear about that girl?
What? Pregnant?
Who? I don't know all these little old boys (...).
Cholly? Her daddy?
Uh-huh.
Lord. Have mercy. That dirty nigger (...). I knew he was crazy for sure then (...). Well, it probably won't live. They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself. She be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking (*TBE*, pp. 188-189).

Pecola's victimization by her mother attests of her rejection by the whole American society. The phrase "that dirty nigger" simply illustrates how this character is victimized not because she has had sex with her father, but because she is black and ugly. Her mother's hatred for her shows how Blacks put into practice the hatred they learn every day from the white man. This means that one of Toni Morrison's intentions in writing *The Bluest Eye* is to display some aspects of violence inflicted on Blacks not only by their white counterparts, but also by Blacks themselves.

The author insists on Blacks' victimization by Blacks when she shows how women are abused by their own husbands whose blood from beatings is cleaned up by the first: "They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to

receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand” (*TBE*, p. 138). The author presents “black women” as the ones who foot the bill of their husbands’ victimization by Whites. For, the sentence “they went home to receive abuse from the victim” really stands for our argument. In fact, beating Blacks is, as Martin Luther King argues, “a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit” (King, 1967, p. 41), which means a daily activity of Whites on Blacks. This, in effect, shows Blacks’ inferiority before the white man. This inferiority is even observed in the way Whites and their children give orders to Blacks to do this or that, as the author writes: “White women said, ‘Do this’. White children said, ‘Give me that’. White men said, ‘Come here’. Black men said, ‘Lay down’. The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other” (*TBE*, p. 138). This quotation brings evidence that in the United States black Americans are taken for granted by all white Americans who consider themselves as superior to them. In such circumstances, Blacks have no alternative, but to obey the white man’s orders in order to be at the shelter of their grievances. For, going against their will is seen as a byword for defying them and attracting a tragic end to oneself.

Toni Morrison is not alone to denounce Whites’ brutality on Blacks in her work of fiction, because other novelists like Ernest J. Gaines in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, too, shows how a black man is whipped and killed in the bush by patrollers on his way to Ohio to enjoy freedom and the full fruition of the American democracy: “They came in on horses and mules, and soon as they saw the slow-wit they surrounded him and started beating him with sticks of wood (...). They beat him, he covered up, but they beat him till he was down” (Gaines, 1971, p. 21). This scene undoubtedly recalls the historical victimization of Blacks in the United States that Steve Estes terms “the denigration of the race” (Estes, 2005, p. 17). He for example shows how black men are not allowed to do whatever they want, or go wherever they want when he argues that “to exercise manhood, as white men displayed it, was to invite disaster” (Estes, *ibid.*, p. 6). That is why we see that in the novel, characters do not react to the insults of Whites hurled at them, because, as they argue, those insults are part of the nuisance of life. These insults reduce them to nothingness and classify them as second zone citizens. This inferior state is what certainly pushes a white female character in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* to refuse to be supervised by Bob Jones, because he is black, as she says: “I ain’t gona work with a nigger” (Himes, quoted by Estes, *ibid.*, p. 26). One realizes that Blacks’ color of skin is a great obstacle for African Americans to integrate the American society. Pecola who is part of the system sees the word “black” as an insult and challenges her white

opponent in a very furious way:

Black? Who you calling black? You! You think you so cute! I swung at her and missed, hitting Pecola in the face. Furious at my clumsiness, I threw my notebook at her, but it caught her in the small of her velvet back, for she had turned and was flying across the street against traffic. Safe on the other side, she screamed at us, I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute! (*TBE*, p. 73).

Pecola's reaction to this female white character shows the starting point of Blacks' resistance against Whites' oppression. Perhaps, she has understood the impossibility for her to change the color of her eyes into blue so as to integrate the American society, and thinks she must fight for it as black and be accepted as such. She undoubtedly espouses Malcolm X's philosophy stating that Blacks should respond to white violence with black violence. In short, in developing the theme of sexual harassment, Toni Morrison brings evidence on women's victimization as part of Blacks' experience which has contributed to the completion of her novel. Prior to this sexual assault, are insults and rejection by both, Blacks and Whites.

Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, we have discovered that Toni Morrison's account in *The Bluest Eye* is really drawn from the American history. The Blacks' rejection and victimization by their white counterparts evidenced through humiliations, insults, mockeries, beatings, and sexual abuses, are conceptual tools that form historical core in this novel. The mistreatments inflicted on Blacks by some of their black fellows are seen as the results of the wrongful teachings of the Westerners that restrict the beauty standards to white skin and blue eyes. This ideology that inhabits black characters' spirits in this narrative ends up making them look for blue eyes as a form of integration in the white man's world. Through Blacks' rejection and victimization on the American soil, one may say that Toni Morrison has succeeded in exploring the literary issue which consists in incorporating history into a work of fiction.

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