

Monological Inflictions on the Margins of Existence: The Design of Madness in *The Bluest Eye*

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There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time

— Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

The universal disposition of being marginalised has, since time immemorial, been the basic categorisation of individuals based on certain parameters which were initially on the basis of roles assigned for convenience and parameters defined for segregation. But as humans evolved, it became the parentheses of the way they began to assume themselves and the people of their kind with a self-imposed sense of classification. It is the fixation of order and its forced reinforcement which made the human slashes of existence to be implicated and followed thoroughly. With the advent of birth, the principles of naming followed by caste, race, colour, etc. become factors of identity as the source of origin. In this diabolic disposition of the individual, a sense of self begins to embellish into an ornamental being where the prescribed authority stays and stages the human's defined and routine existence.

The dominance of one individual over the other and thus attaining autonomy is multi-fold when the system appreciates one element while it dismisses another. These divisions are noticed by Toni Morrison, in her work *The Bluest Eye* (1970), as in the above-mentioned statement she addressed the concerning issues of acceptance in the terms 'dislike', and 'rejected' where no individual could be said to have never hosted such an emotion. It is the essence of feeling, a subtle sense of touch that enriches the soul like a dewdrop in a desert and reaches the core of a shadowed tree which never had a green leaf. Such is the metaphysical aspect of human existence where the formidable idea of Self is governed by a set of principles the given system operates with. It is the system of monologues where the vacancy of speech is prevalent under an authority, and all are mere subjects to power politics.

A monologue, as Mikhail M. Bakhtin agrees, "pretends to be the ultimate word ... it closes down the represented world and the represented persons" (293). It becomes the standard of understanding where the praxis of cause and effect is defined only by the monologue. The authority it asserts, in turn, subverts the presence of anything that is beyond its control and definition of existence.

Thus, it is at the margins that madness arrives as a phenomenon where that which fails to empirically belong to the system is termed as mad. The idea of madness as an ailment highlights how doubts are addressed in a system. The need to crush and silence these voices is done by the monologue in order to sustain its authority. With the lack of vibrancies, individuals sustain the role of being submissive as they follow and are in accord with the professed parameters of the system, while the madman has to be pushed outside the boundaries of the system as madness is propagated as initiation of threat for those who do not wish to exercise free will.

The imaginative leaps, which are able to flourish when there is freedom of expression, become consigned with the monological approach as it tries to control the natural dynamicity of the Self. The authority of a monologue makes the elements believe that the nuances of existence which do not belong to the system are unnatural and immoral. Such a version of reality, where certain jurisdictions are made by those in power, ensures that a system flourishes blind faith on the parameters which etch the boundaries between right and wrong in a predestined manner and not as the hollow constructions they empirically are. The spur of being natural is considered irrational where a correction model needs to be adopted as a measuring scale to qualify the human self as human. One should comprehend that no individual or group of individuals have the supremacy of defining acceptability parameters that remain persistent eternally. The doubt on such a postulation is bleak when humans endlessly seek the aspects of locating normalcy in their life and in the life of their loved ones. Those who remain varied from the urge of being endlessly at the centre or willing to be at the cent of the system are abnormal, and their self-imposed sense of abnormality causes them to be mad.

Madness is deployed by writers as a narrative technique where, instead of placing it disparities of black and white, it is insisted as the grey zone of existence, which is aesthetically competent and potential but is doomed to be interpreted as a fallen state of existence that must be endlessly abhorred and detested by the normal human beings of a system. The consequential madness in character entails the attention of the reader as a factor that is pushed to the margins through the channels of the centrality of a system. The monologue tries to hold and subvert the madman's voice by emphasising the immorality of the madman and his/her inability to belong to the natural order of being. A defiant state of being marginal has the capacity to bombard the madman with a sense of regret. In an attempt to belong to the centrality of a system, the madman etches a desperate urge to be affiliated with the parameters of monological impositions that define the attributes of belonging in a system.

Morrison, in *The Bluest Eye*, expressed the creation of monological stances where the already acknowledged system of black people began to reflect upon themselves as dark-skinned individuals who are barbaric in comparison to their white counterparts. She explored the nuances with which the conviction gained its deep-rooted sense of naturality in the mind of the white as well as the black human beings on both sides of the slash. The view of black people about their own selves reflects how the supremacy of a monologue is established. A culture fluent and flourished before the intervention of a higher order of being becomes the victim of the colour prejudice, where white becomes pure and clean whereas black stands for dark and evil. The African-American experience of reality changes when they are confined to a system of power. The heightened self of awareness finds its origin, as in his essay “Signs Taken for Wonder”, Homi K. Bhabha explains it, through the concept of ‘The Book’ upon the arrival of colonialism as an authority which wished to be spread from the first utterance itself: “The discovery of the book is, at once a moment of originality and authority, as well as a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced” (38). Therefore, with the appearance of ‘The Book’, it becomes a standpoint for all the literature created. The mad metaphor of superiority governs that any creative venture taken post the discovery of the great book will always be considered as submissive to the original with regard to the originality and the dynamicity of the idea that was always already conceptualised and negotiated by the moral stances of morality that govern the system. This is the same authority with which the blacks were referred to as counterparts to their fair-skinned masters. It is here, with the impositions of a superior, the establishment of a monologue occurs to the consciousness of the people.

The writers of literature thus wish to bring focus on these reasons and parameters as to why someone considers himself or herself as marginal. It tries to enlighten the idea of the ‘other’ as equivalent to the self where with the presence of madness as a literary tool, it brings approximations to the monologue. The sense of ultimate reality that lies beyond the constructed hands of a few, when experienced, determines the scope of defiance present in the subjects. With the eradication of the system, as Jacques Derrida stated, highlights the presence of aporias in the system which celebrates the humanistic approach to life. It is in the ruptures of the absolute autonomy that life happens. The fissures make it possible, if not to knock down the system, to at least create spaces of creative natural stances that humans have the potent capacity to claim for their own selves. The aesthetics of beauty is present in those crevices which etch for it being recognisable in the eyes of the readers as in its natural appeal it arrives.

The sense of beauty when unapproachable makes it difficult to grasp as in the case of Pecola who craved for acceptance. It was the need for beauty that made her an apparatus of the monologue wherein her madness for the bluest eyes urges her to become symbolic of the conception of seeking approval and hence a victim of the monologue. Pecola conceived the lack of love as an extension of her destined body lacking those beautiful blue eyes. The signifiers of beauty, when it is situated as the pivotal standpoint for affection, show the degradation of an emotional self. It befits the physical sense of beauty as the signifiatory triggers making her believe that it is only through the attainment of those blue eyes that she could be potent and capable enough to be loved. Such derogatory receptors of standardised beauty are workings of the system which formulate the ceremonial aspects of beauty in its fixed shape rather than negotiating the actuality of its form which is beyond mundane triggers of colour, tone, etc. The structurality of a building, when compared to the maddened flow of the river in its natural form, depicts how nature can be beautiful whilst being threatening and unshaped. The customisation is not eternally and always necessary. It is such a notion which writers of literature urge their readers to comprehend in their empirical reality and claim a perspective beyond the stringency of a system's structurality towards parameters of belongingness and normalcy.

Morrison, as a writer, rarely propagated in the text but ensured that the readers observed Pecola as a madwoman whose madness was consequential through the infliction of the monologue in the context of beauty and happiness. Madness becomes the metaphor for those at the margins as they crave inhumanely to belong to the human essences of life and be a part of the society that is gleaming with happiness, progress, and affection. Pecola asked Claudia, "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" (Morrison 30). It manifests the conception of love as a thing to be obtained through obedience towards mannerisms and also traits of the former of which can be attained through mirroring attempts of institutions, but the latter is an aspect that is externally imposed on a human being since birth. With the materialisation of an emotion, a child suffers at the hands of a system while the white, pretty Shirely Temples of the world, are adorned with affection and are idolised as a state that is to be achieved by each child to be an acceptable woman that shall be suited for a capable man in the coming years of her life. It is the stimulation of certain defined aspects of beauty which arouses and ensures the death of self-esteem in many like Pecola. The cruelty of such distancing is doubled as Pauline, Pecola's mother, herself rejects Pecola as an ugly abhorrence. Pauline, in her affiliations to her daughter, was confined as Pecola was heard calling her mother as Mrs. Breedlove and nothing else. The sense of the system and the

heightened sense of being where an innocent child is made the scapegoat for the entire community is observed by Claudia:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed.
And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to
us. All of us all who knew her-felt so wholesome after we cleaned
ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her
ugliness . . . Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent.
(Morrison 203)

It registers the concept of beauty forced upon the community. The thriving thirst for power subverted the instincts between a mother and her child. It is this establishment of mad monologues which turns rogue and entraps those who are not shrewd in the dynamics of subjugating the other to make their own self hierarchically superior in such a dialogue.

Madness, therefore, includes shelling of an element which in order to survive, seeks contemplation. It is in this self-reflection that, if not the character, the readers are able to witness in the reality of what they have articulated upon those elements which do not overtly belong through the filters of acceptability. The doubt initiated a feeling and sense of disgust as an innocent child becomes a puppet and is made to believe she lacks parameters that quantify her to deserve love. Pecola's silent acceptance of the system as the natural order of being imposed the blind urge in humans to follow the monologic version of reality. Here madness becomes a necessity to go through with the disease of appearance. T.S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" etches the visions of reality as, "There will be time, there will be time/ To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (lines 26-27) while indicating the duplicity that lies in the faces prepared to meet other consciousness of a system. The pretense of beauty that beholds the eye is appreciated more in contrast to the natural beauty of the soul. The monologue establishes the gaze of a consciousness' essence as the standard parameter of acceptability and belongingness.

The supremacy of the system is expressed by Bhaktin as "Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities" (292). It explains how the system thrives on hegemony and objects to the presence of any other consciousness that can claim authenticity to a divergent version of reality. Morrison explored a dimension of madness and its predominance through Claudia, whose role in the narrative was to observe the politics and dominance of the monologue. She elaborates on the constructed ways in which adults appropriate the young essences of a system, "Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions They issue orders without providing information" (Morrison 8). Morrison manifests the presence

of a monarch who sets a definitive charter of existence in order to rule and govern without noticing the parallel universe of identities as diverse consciousness but interprets them only as immoral instances of existence.

The idea of authority as Claudia stated, “When we discovered that she clearly did not want to dominate us, we liked her” (Morrison 17), prompts the constructed notion of the other as a threat. When they met Pecola, it was the fear of the unknown that made Claudia and her sister doubt Pecola’s viewpoint, but it soon subsided when she became their friend. Claudia matters to the marginal dynamics for she understood that the approach of Pecola was not to appropriate them but to celebrate them by accepting them along with their dynamicity and diversity. The madness of identity creation, and the need to assess the idea of threat, highlights the nuances in which human beings operate in active relational positions. Claudia becomes a mirror to the objective self in the narrative who displayed the reality as it is, “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 learning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. ‘Yes,’ they had said. ‘You are right’ (Morrison 37).

The ability to contradict has been taken from them in order to establish a monopoly. It is the sense of the self as better that led to the deterioration of the other. The parameters that etch an individual as a self or the other is through the notions of the monologue’s conceptualisation of reality. The version of acceptance and self-imposition of black inferiority is shown in the meek submission of ‘You are right’ signifying that which remains is absolutely wrong.

Morrison depicted the intricacy of her culture when the chance to be a natural existence is not taken but rather submitted by the blacks as a display of how the paradigm of silence occurs from the surface of an aesthetically potent community. The acceptance of a belief as truth is deadening to the human praxis of being sensitive and sensible. The realisation of oppression as the ultimate reality is responsible for the murder of the selves in characters like Pecola and many others for whom the presumed system of predominance is worthier than nature. It is here that madness enriches the humane side of the Self, which believes in the possibility of an error in the system as also natural and moral. The reason why an innocent child is portrayed at the threshold of this monological stance in the novel is explained as, “The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has ‘legs’” (Morrison 8) foregrounding how the initial seeds of consent in the young minds are sown to follow the system. The version of reality propagated by the monologue is of established sovereignty at whose command orders are disposed of while the individuals become subjects of the administration.

The version of this establishment is visible in Pauline for whom the search for beauty was only possible outside the black town as she began working for a white family. “She found beauty, order, cleanliness and praise” (Morrison 125) in the Fisher’s household which reflects how symbolically her own house became dirty, ugly, and filthy like the people it was surrounded with. The sense of acceptance in being a maid in a white house rather than the owner of a black house depicts how seeds of abandonment are sown in the ground reality exclusively in a quest to be affiliated to, and in proximity with, the meaning-making praxis. Her rejection of her own family made her achieve a sense of liberty as now, “the creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers” (126). The affiliations of white as better choices of being existent in society continues to haunt the natural self as it offered a sense of comfort to be uplifted away from the decadent state of the margins. Pauline scolded her own daughter in the Fisher’s house when she spilt the blueberry cake on the floor. Her affection towards the white child and rejection of her own daughter disturbed the readers as the nuance of discardment she offers for a particular skin colour. She was enchanted by the films where the beauty of life is depicted in the glamour of lights and dreams through the constructed triggers of beauty and the American manner of dreams through products and possessions. Her keenness was to achieve that clean, neat, and beautiful household as propagated by the monologue. The madness for beauty made her confess for her own daughter, “But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (124). The fact that she gave up on her own house and daughter mirrors the hypocrisy of the system. The sense that it turns invisible to see the child as beautiful apart from the standardised form of creation as done by the monologue. It was this instance which made Pecola realise the need for beauty in order to be accepted not only by the people of the society but even the members of her family.

Morrison, in the narrative, described the brown people as those who “married ‘up,’ lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features” (166). It portrayed their need in them to get rid of the innate yet external trigger of darkness they were born with. The aspiring nature, where the black would prefer to become a hint akin to the white element instead of remaining as a dark entity, bothers the cognitive rationality of the readers where it seems as a certain state of madness in itself where the drastic nature of steps taken to belong are intensely gruesome, unnatural, and sometimes even forced without basic contemplation. The pressure of the mob mentality where what the administration is moved and supported at the command of the leader are the undertones in a monologue. Madness becomes important because it craves its

own understanding of the dialogue as the issue of natural and unnatural is addressed. The essence of a madman lies in recognition of the Self which individuals like Pauline, in her own mad monological manner of pursuing parameters of beauty, was unable to witness and observe. It is here that the readers focus on how mad normal human beings are in their rationality, also subjective to the perspective with which their actions are scrutinised and received.

The madness for beauty, nationalism, identity, or love, where it becomes a need in humans, is the result of the lack the madman suffers from. Stereotypical madness is more applicable to the normal elements of the system, while those at the margins have an aesthetic beauty in them. Pecola began to belong to this sense of beauty as she never became heroic in her stance against the monologue. All she ever wanted to be was natural. The realisation of “Pecola’s voice was no more than a sigh” (65) makes her essence as humane in contrast to the loud and vocal monologues.

Thus, madness becomes an empirical actuality of existence for those who do not belong. The free will of a predestined orientation finds its root in the organic sense of a being, which is possibly the concept of conviction. It is the basic reason which is dependent on how the trust of human beings works on the linear and deterministic systems of reality and its ideas. Madness is the journey through which one departs towards a realm where the rationality of the madman is not always already irrational and insane but a varied version of the rationality that might offer much more sense beyond the spatio-temporal experiences of a particular system. Writers negotiate madness as a method and as a design through which questions are surfaced in the cognitive realm of the readers. Pecola may have been effaced by the monologue of beauty, but she nonetheless extends the aesthetics of her madness as a dire condition that was forced upon her through no fault of her own.

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