

THE USE OF SOME LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES IN TONY MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE A STYLISTIC STUDY

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ملخص البحث:

تعد الدراسات الاسلوبية اللغوية احدى اهم الوسائل التي تساعد المتلقي على الوصول الى فهم اعمق للنصوص الادبية وغير الادبية وذلك لما يوفره الفهم اللغوي لاسلوب الكتابة من وصول الى مدى ابعاد في فهم الرسالة الادبية ذاتها. وتأتي هذه الدراسة من هذا الاتجاه اذ تحاول عمل تحليل لغوي لأهم السمات الأسلوبية لأحدى أهم كاتبات الرواية الأمريكية وهي توني موريسون والتي مارست العمل كأستاذة للادب الانجليزي بالاضافة الى دورها العظيم في كتابة الرواية الأمريكية في القرن العشرين. وقد تجلت ابداعات هذه الكاتبة في رواية "العين الأكثر زرقة" والتي تتناول معاناة الانسان الاسود في المجتمع الأمريكي الذي ينظر الى هذا الانسان بطريقة غير آدمية لا تتفق مع أبسط قواعد حقوق الإنسان التي تسمو بالقيم الانسانية النبيلة و تنظر الى الانسان بعين العدل و الكرامة و الاحترام بصرف النظر عن لونه او دينه او اي عوامل اخرى.

Abstract:

Literature and stylistics are basically interrelated. Linguistic stylistics provides the tools that help readers in reaching a deeper understanding of a literary or nonliterary piece of work. This study is a trial to linguistically analyze some major stylistic features of Tony Morrison's The Bluest Eye as employed by the writer through using some linguistic tools as known and perceived by both the linguistic theorists and language users and students. The areas of analysis include the title and sub titles, the use of narrative techniques and finally symbols as major linguistic features that apparently characterize the writer's style.

It is hoped that the study will be a useful step for both the students of literature and those of linguistics on equal foot.

Key words : Black American Literature - Linguistic Stylistics - Narrative Technique – Prologue - Stylistic Analysis Subtitles – Symbols – Titles - Toni Morrison

1. Introduction

Literature and stylistics are part and parcel since the relationship between both of them is interrelated. Never is the relationship but integral as while literature provides the raw material required for analysis, stylistics provides the tools required for conducting this analysis and since any piece of a literary work is written in one language or another, it is impossible to study literature away from language. This study is a trial to linguistically analyze some major stylistic features of Tony Morrison's The Bluest Eye. It begins with an introduction followed by a brief background on the importance of Morrison, a section for the linguistic background of the study and ends with the choice and analysis section which includes the analysis of the title and subtitles, narrative technique and symbols as some major stylistic traits of Morrison's style in this novel. This section is followed by a conclusion which is followed by a bibliography of the main sources used and consulted for the production of this research.

2. Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was born in 1931 in Ohio. She is considered one of the most influential African American writers and is a Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes winner. Generally, Morrison's novels are known for their human themes, highly effective language, use of distinguished dialogue and her great black characters portrayal. The Bluest Eye and Song of Solomon are two of her best known novels that reflect her philosophy and most apparent stylistic traits.

Though she handled issues that touch upon the major problems that the blacks encountered, as a child, Morrison was not fully aware of racial divisions of the American society until she was in her teens. This is because she spent her early years in an integrated neighborhood which was characterized by a reasonable level of tolerance. She joined Howard University where her interest in literature flourished and she majored in English language and literature and this helped in polishing her literary skills and it also availed a golden chance for her to be closer to the suffering of the blacks.

2.1 Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

In general, Morrison's novels are obviously characterized by using specific themes, vernacular language and symbols. This is very clear in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, which was published in 1970 and is set in the town where Morrison grew up. The novel is told from the point of view of a nine-year-old girl, which is the age of Morrison in 1941, the year when events of the novel took place. Though the novel was not an immediate success, Morrison continued to write other novels such as *Sula*, *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* until she was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1993.

2.2 Plot of *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is made up of interlocking stories of several characters. Those different stories are very human in the sense that they contain elements of both good and evil and are told by different characters.

At the very beginning, we know that a nine-year-old girl; Claudia, and a ten-year-old girl; Frieda MacTeer, live with their parents at about the end of the Great Depression time. It is clear that the girls' parents are not paying much attention to them. The MacTeers take in Henry Washington and also a young girl whose name was Pecola and whose father has tried to burn down his family's house, and Claudia and Frieda feel sorry for her. Pecola loves Shirley Temple, and we are told that she is taken by the idea that whiteness is beautiful and that she is ugly because she is not white neither does she possess blue eyes.

Pecola's life is difficult as we notice that her father drinks a lot, her mother is alienated and both of them often beat each other. She also has a brother called Sammy who runs away each now and then. Pecola believes that if she had blue eyes, she would be loved and her life would be better. She often receives confirmation of her own sense of ugliness from people around her. For example, the grocer looks right through her, boys make fun of her, and a light-skinned girl, called Maureen, makes fun of her each now and then. Her feeling of inferiority is reinforced

when she is wrongly blamed for killing a boy's cat. The boy's mother calls her a 'nasty little black bitch'.

We learn that Pecola's parents have always had difficult lives. Her mother, Pauline, has a lame foot and has always felt isolated. She loses herself in watching movies that support the feeling of inferiority and alienation in her. She feels that she is an ugly creature who is deprived of romantic love which, she supposes, is reserved only for the beautiful. She encourages her husband's violence and cruelty towards her to reinforce her image as a victim.

Cholly, Pecola's father, was abandoned by his parents and he was brought up by his great aunt, who died when he was a teenager. We are also told that he was humiliated by two white men who found him having sex and made him continue while they watched. He tried to find his father who rebuffed him. When he met Pauline, he was a cruel rootless man who feels that he was involved in his marriage and has since lost any desire or interest in life. One day, Cholly returns home and finds Pecola washing dishes and he uses the chance and rapes her. When she tells her mother of the rape incident, her mother does not believe her and beats her instead. Torn Pecola goes to Soaphead Church asking him for blue eyes but instead of helping her, he uses her to kill a dog he does not like.

Claudia and Frieda discover that Pecola was impregnated by her father. Surprisingly enough, they want the baby to live and they sacrifice the money they have been saving for a bicycle and plant marigold seeds. They think if the flowers live, Pecola's baby will live too, but the flowers do not bloom, and Pecola's baby dies. Finally, Cholly dies in a workhouse and Pecola goes mad, believing that she has fulfilled her dream of having the bluest eyes.

2.3 Major Characters:

In fact, Morrison presented a number of characters who stand out as symbols of the Blacks' suffering in an unfair community. Her innovation lies in her ability to create

interesting and multidimensional characters. She takes the position of the blacks and she was very close to their life experience and pains. She was able to demonstrate all the dimensions of suffering of the blacks when she wrote *The Bluest Eye*.

2.3.1 Pecola Breedlove

Pecola is the protagonist of the novel who passively suffers the abuse of her mother, father, and classmates. She is lonely and imaginative. She is an eleven-year-old black girl who believes that she is ugly. She is the victim of her skin color. She thinks that having blue eyes would make her beautiful and her life better. She acquires sympathy for her sensitivity and delicacy in addition to her tragic end.

2.3.2 Claudia MacTeer

Claudia is the narrator of some parts of the novel. She is a nine-year-old black girl who is independent, pure and strong-minded. She never acquired the self-hatred feeling that plagued her community. She has such a strong personality that she rebels against adults' tyranny over children. Finally, she fights against the unfair standards of her community and she stands firmly against the black community's over estimation of white beauty standards.

2.3.3 Cholly Breedlove

Cholly is Pecola's father. He is very violent in a dangerous way. He is the victim of early humiliations that he underwent and stored in his heart. Those humiliations cause frustration feelings into his heart and he takes out this frustration on his wife. He has both tenderness and rage. However, he allows rage to be triumphant by the end of the story.

2.3.4 Pauline Breedlove

She is Pecola's mother, who believes that she is ugly. This belief has made her lonely and lifeless. She has a lame foot and sees herself as the martyr of a terrible marriage. She finds meaning not in her own family but in romantic movies and in her work caring for a wealthy white family. This reflects her feeling of inferiority towards the Whites. She feels most alive and active when she is

at work at a white woman's home. She loves this home and despises her own.

2.3.5 Frieda MacTeer

She is Claudia's sister. She is a ten-year-old girl and she shares her sister's independence and stubbornness. Because she is closer to adolescence, she has more knowledge and experience of her community. She is very critical to her community and hates community equation of whiteness with beauty. Frieda is more knowledgeable about the adult world and sometimes braver than Claudia.

3. Stylistics and Literature

Stylistics may roughly be defined as the scientific study of style and this includes both the spoken and the written forms of language. Misra mentions that "the study of style in written or spoken language has established itself as a distinct discipline with the help of its objective, the methodological approach to the study of language. The use of language in any communication, written or spoken, is highly structured and stylistics tries to unfold the structure of a message systematically". (Misra 2012) Also, a stylistic study is an attempt to explore creative language use leading to enhancement of readers' sensitivity to language to reach a fuller understanding of texts from different domains in a systematic way. Hence, it is generally accepted that stylistics is a basic method of textual understanding and interpretation springing from a systematic analysis of the different linguistic features of any text whether spoken or written. As style is a distinctive way of using language to convey meaning in the most appropriate way, the methods of stylistic analysis are wide enough that they can handle various literary and non-literary texts and the role of stylistics is crucial in understanding the relationship between language use and its functions. The importance of stylistics and stylistic analysis lies in the fact that stylistic studies can be linked to and are present in such other disciplines as discourse analysis and pragmatics.

3.1 The aim of stylistic analysis

A lot has been said about the relationship between linguistic studies and their role in studying literary works and the contribution of stylistics in this vein. According to Short (1995), stylistic analysis tries to "explicate how our understanding of a text is achieved, by examining in detail the linguistic organization of the text and how a reader needs to interact with that linguistic organization to make sense of it. Often, such a detailed examination of a text does reveal new aspects of interpretation or help us to see more clearly how a text achieves what it does." (Short, 1995) In addition, Crystal Davy (1969) indicates that the "aim of stylistics is to analyze language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion, these features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context to explain where possible why such features have been used as opposed to other alternatives." Davy (1969) of course, these features can be classified into categories according to their function in the social context. Finally, Short (1981) states that the aim of stylistics and stylistic studies is to "explain how readers get from the words of a text to (a) an understanding of it and (b) a felt response of it." Short (1981)

4. Choice and analysis

The analysis in this study includes the analysis of the title and subtitles, narrative technique and symbols as some major stylistic traits of Morrison's style in *The Bluest Eye*. According to Jeffries (2012), stylistics is "eclectic in its use of theory of structuralism as developed by Saussure". Therefore, selecting areas suitable for stylistic analysis must be based on both recurrence and distinction and sometimes deviation from normal style as sometimes, style is looked upon as mere deviation from norms. Also, stylistic analysis has to be systematic as was pointed out by Crystal who thinks that stylistics may be defined "as a sub discipline of linguistics that is

concerned with the systematic analysis of style in language and how this can vary according to such factors as, for example, genre, context, historical period and author". (Crystal) Upon the concept of choice and the eclectic nature of the text, three areas will be analyzed as is detailed in the next pages. This study covers areas creating the writer's uniqueness, including the title and the subtitles, symbols and narrative technique.

4.1 Title

The title of the novel is composed of three items; the article "the", the adjective "Bluest" and finally the noun "eye". The most significant word in the title is the adjective "bluest" and the reason is that it refers to the color of eye that most white people possess. This color symbolizes all meanings of superiority and beauty for Pecola because it is thought of as a merit for the Whites of which the Blacks are deprived. *The Bluest Eye* tells the story of three black girls one of them is eleven years old and she wants to have blue eyes thinking that her life would be better and she would be more beautiful if she had blue eyes. She even goes beyond ideas to practice as she imitates the appearance of the Whites but this ends in a tragedy.

The message that Morrison wanted to say is that even when we try to imitate the appearance of Whites, we will lose our identity and we will never be white in color. In fact, this is a principle adopted by Morrison when addressing the issue of racial discrimination and social injustice. She holds this concept responsible for a lot of tragedies in the life of the Blacks. Blue eyes are generally associated with the Whites whereas black skinned people do not naturally have those blue eyes. The desire of the black girl to have blue eyes reflects a feeling of inferiority that is innate in the blacks due to the givings of a society that does not recognize the full rights of the black skinned people as full citizens. For the girl, blue eyed people symbolize beauty and social status and in so doing, Morrison sums

up the feelings of despair and inferiority of the black girl whose dream in life is just to have two blue eyes and it will never come true.

On the other hand, the noun "eye" refers to the ability to see things as they are. However, Pecola, who is obsessed with having blue eyes, believes that this mark of beauty will change the way that others see her and hence the way that she sees the world. The novel contains several references to other characters' eyes. For example, Mr. Yacobowski's hostility to Pecola resides in the blankness in his own eyes, and in his inability to see a black girl. This stresses the novel's repeated concern for the difference between how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how our color contributes in this. It is all about the difference between superficial sight and true insight and between both, several tragedies could take place. The idea that whiteness is associated with beauty, cleanliness and sterility is destructive in a multi-colored community. In fact, different colors must be associated with happiness when seeing the rainbow with its different colors; yellow, green, and purple. Morrison uses this imagery to emphasize the nature of beauty that lies in the mosaic of structure and color and the destructiveness of the black community's privileging of whiteness and blueness.

4.2 Subtitles

The novel is composed of eleven chapters each of which carries one of the names of the four seasons of the year as three are entitled "autumn", two "winter", four "spring" and two "summer". There is always that ironic relationship between the title and the content in matters of feelings, atmosphere and sequence of events. The novel is divided into the four seasons that obviously contradict our expectations of these seasons. For example, spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal, reminds Claudia of being whipped with new switches, and it is the season when Pecola's is raped. Pecola's baby dies in autumn, which is supposed to be the season of

harvesting. Morrison uses such natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters' experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether 'the earth itself might have been unyielding to someone like Pecola.' (Morrison 1970)

4.3 Narrative techniques

The narrative technique employed by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* is highly connected to the genre of the novel which comprises both tragedy and elegy. The literary context is not simple because it is a mixture of stream-of-consciousness, multiple perspectives, and intended fragmentation that are all techniques used in the narration of this novel. In general, Morrison is very much successful in employing several techniques in narrating the novel as there are mainly two narrators of the novel. MacTeer narrates in a mixture of a child's and an adult's perspective. Also, an omniscient narrator and the point of view are employed. Though Claudia's and Pecola's points of view prevail, we can frequently see things from Cholly's, Pauline's, and other characters' points of view. In fact, narration is linked to the psychology of the main characters and point of view is fragmented to give a sense of the characters' experiences of dislocation and to create a feeling of sympathy with some of those characters.

Grammatically speaking, the tense used in the narrative is the past from adult Claudia's point of view and the time setting is the years 1940 and 1941. The novel opens with a narrative from a Dick-and-Jane reading primer, a narrative that is fragmented when Morrison runs its sentences and then its words together.

4.3.1 Prologue

In fact, the prologue gives an overview of the novel and overshadows events as a whole. First, we are told that the story will be told from a child's perspective. There is a number of sentences that are not spread out with pictures, as they would be in an actual

reader, we become uncomfortably aware of their shortness and abruptness. The sentence lacks cohesion in much the same way as the children of this novel who lack ways to connect the disjointed, often frightening experiences that make up their lives. The substance of the narrative, though written in resolutely cheerful language, is also disturbing. Though we are told that the family that lives in the pretty house is happy, Jane seems to be alienated. This is clear when she approaches her mother to play, the mother simply laughs, and when she asks her father to play, her father does nothing but smiling. This absence of connection between sentences reflects the lack of connection and communication among the members of the family.

4.3.1.1 Part one

The prologue technique is used for foreshadowing the events of the novel and the behavior of its main characters. It is a two part monologue where each part has a specific function as is clear in part one which begins with a series of sentences that seem to come from a child's vision. The sentences describe a house and the family that lives in the house—Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane. The narrative focuses on Jane. The pet cat will not play with Jane, and when Jane asks her mother to play, she laughs. When Jane asks her father to play, he smiles, and the dog runs away instead of playing with Jane. Then a friend comes to play with Jane. This sequence is repeated literally without punctuation marks. It is then repeated for the third time. This time, there are no spaces between the words neither are there any punctuation marks.

4.3.1.2 Part two

The second part of the prologue begins in a different way as an unnamed narrator explains that there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941, when she was nine years old. She relates that she and her sister believed that there were no marigolds because Pecola, a slightly older black girl, was having her father's baby; it was not only their own marigold seeds that did not

sprout—none of the marigolds in the community did. The sisters believed that if they said the right words over the seeds, the seeds would blossom and Pecola's baby would be safely delivered. But the seeds refused to sprout, and the two sisters blamed each other for this failure in order to relieve their sense of guilt. For years, the narrator believed that her sister was right—that she had planted the seeds too deeply. But now she believes the earth itself was barren as their dream was.

In this part, Morrison uses repetition of the same sentences in different ways for technical and artistic reasons. When the Dick-and-Jane story repeats without divisions between the sentences, its components are more connected because they run together more but without a clear meaning. The meaninglessness of the sequence becomes clearer and more shocking, because the sequence is accelerated. In the third repetition, when all the words run together, the speed and closeness of the connection between the elements of the story make it more difficult to read or understand. This third repetition makes us expect a rich but fragmented story. Though the two parts of the prologue are similar in many ways, they are different in expression. Whereas the first section lacks connection between ideas, people, and sentences, the second section contains more connections, including an association between the natural cycles of the earth and the unnatural components of the story. There is also a connection between action and some ethical questions where the sisters feel guilty because their seeds have not grown, and they look for someone to blame. Such kinds of connections give the story meaning, in the face of the meaningless order of the Dick-and-Jane sentences. Through this technique, Morrison's was able to present readers with a structure for the work as a whole, and the novel moves between the extremes of the meaningless, fractured, and damaged of the first part of the prologue, and the meaningful, lyrical,

and cohesion as represented in the second part of the prologue.

4.4 Symbols

Symbols are literary devices that can help to develop and inform about the major themes and characters in a literary text. Morrison's style is characterized by her wide use of symbols that are professionally employed for a variety of reasons. Symbols are seasons, figures, colors, objects and sometimes characters used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. In *The Bluest Eye*, the house and the bluest eyes are examples of symbols as used in this novel for a variety of reasons.

4.4.1 The House

The house is a symbol of the feeling of both discrimination and inferiority. The novel begins with a sentence from a Dick-and-Jane narrative who says, 'Here is the house.' In the novel homes indicate both socioeconomic status in this novel and they also symbolize the emotional situations and values of the characters living in them. The Breedlove apartment is a miserable place that suffers from Mrs. Breedlove's preference for her white employer's home over her own flat. It also symbolizes the misery of the Breedlove family. The MacTeer house is drafty and dark, but it is carefully tended by Mrs. MacTeer and, according to Claudia, filled with love, symbolizing that family's comparative cohesion.

In fact, the black characters in the novel are obsessed with cleanliness and associate it with the Whites. Geraldine and Mrs. Breedlove are excessively concerned with housecleaning—though Mrs. Breedlove cleans only the house of her white employers. This focus on cleanliness extends into her moral and emotional quests for purity. Adversely, a clear mark of Claudia's strength of character is her pleasure in her own dirt, a pleasure that reflects her self-confidence and her obvious understanding of the real meaning of happiness.

4.4.2 Bluest Eye(s)

The major symbol in the novel is that of bluest eye and its role in destroying the lives of the poor black girl whose dream is to be with blue eyes. *The Bluest Eye* gives an image of the ways in which internalized white beauty standards could destroy the lives of black people. The idea that whiteness is superior is present everywhere, including the white baby doll given to Claudia, the idealization of Shirley Temple, the consensus that light-skinned Maureen is more beautiful than the other black girls. Also, the idealization of white beauty in the movies, and Pauline Breedlove's preference for the little white girl she works for over her daughter are other examples that reflect the state of helplessness of the Blacks in opposition to the Whites with all the negative and destructive outcomes of such a feeling.

The first observation about the title is that Morrison used the singular form of the word "Eye" and not the plural form "Eyes". Blue eyes symbolize the beauty and happiness that Pecola associates with the white, middle-class world. They also come to symbolize Pecola's own blindness, for she gains blue eyes only at the cost of her sanity. Also, the words "bluest eye" could be associated with the sadness and disease. Also, the word "eye" could be thought of as "I", in the sense that the novel's title uses the singular form of the noun reflecting many of the characters' suffering and feelings of inferiority and alienation. Of course, the victim of the white beauty standards is Pecola. She connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by romantic love, status and respect. This desire eventually leads to madness and destruction.

The question of how we see ourselves and how we want people to see us is highly stressed in Pecola's story. She thinks that the cruelty she experiences with her community lies in how she is seen by others as a black girl without blue eyes. She thinks that with

beautiful blue eyes, people would not harm her or hurt her feelings. She thinks that she and her family are mistreated because they have black skin. Dreaming of having blue eyes, Pecola indicates that she wishes to see things differently and to be seen differently. She can only receive this wish, by blinding herself. Only Pecola is then able to see herself as beautiful as she always wished at the expense of her ability to see herself and the world in which she lives.

4.4.3 The Marigolds

For Claudia and Frieda marigolds are associated with the safety and well-being of Pecola's expected baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds means sacrifice on their part. They innocently think that if the marigolds they have planted grow, Pecola's baby will be safe. In general, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. For Pecola's, the soil is barren and the cycle of renewal is stopped when her father raped her.

5. Conclusion

The novel is a cry in the face of a brutal and merciless society that does not respect the rights of the blacks. It is a loud call for freeing the Blacks' minds of the destructive feelings of inferiority and slavery that results from the way they are treated and looked at. As for her style, we find that she mixes different elements such as fantasy, fable and allegory. She is especially skilled in the very distinctive selection of the title and the subtitles to indicate the inner feelings and psychology of her characters. The use of different narrative techniques and the employment of symbols are other tools that contributed to the reading excitement. Thus, this style makes reading a fruitful experience because the relation between fantasy and allegory is full of excitement while reading for the different messages and meanings in the novel. In addition, we clearly notice her interest in the physical and psychological influence and the outcomes of slavery through a great use of both stylistic features of the language she uses in her novel. *The Bluest Eye* is full of indications

about the suffering of the black Americans especially the black women and the role they play in their community. For example, Cholly does not have an idea about how to raise children and this shows how the male characters are depicted in her novels to enhance the importance of women in the black community. She wants to say that women represent the real source of life and mercy in this cruel world. The narrative techniques, the symbols, seasons, colors, nature, eyes and vision are major linguistic and artistic tools that could work harmoniously to contribute in the creation of a unique style of a great writer.

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