

**Meeting Lula Ann Bridewell as the Postmodern Avatar of Pecola  
Breedlove: A Comparative Study of female protagonists in Toni  
Morrison's God Help the Child and The Bluest Eye**

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**Abstract:**

This research paper aims to explore the hypnotic and enthralling face of Toni Morrison's fiction by portraying the female protagonist of God Help the Child as the postmodern avatar of the female protagonist of The Bluest Eye. Postmodernism is chaotic and challenging both for the conventionally established paradigms and the perennially evolving literary trends. This paper telescopes the literary realism of Morrison's fiction keeping in view her unconventional narrative stylistic and thematic concerns. The appearance of Morrison's latest novel God Help the Child (2015) encourages major critical inquiry in the realm of contemporary postmodernism. A thorough analysis of the two female characters leads to some startling disparities as well as similarities between them. This comparative study aspires to unveil some previously uncharted areas of Morrisonean fiction.

**Keywords:** Postmodern, Avatar, Chaotic, Pedophilia, Sexually Stimulated Slaughter (SSS)

“I refuse to be ashamed of my shame, you know, the one assigned to me which matches the low priority and the degraded morality of those who insist upon this most facile of human feelings of inferiority and flaw simply to disguise their own cowardice by pretending it is identical to a banjo’s purity”

—Morrison in *God Help the Child*

Toni Morrison’s literary oeuvre lends significant space to the realistic details of Afro-American life. Her fictional world stretches beyond literary demarcations creating a body of literature that is both hypnotic and authentic. This comparative study brings to the forefront such stark realities of black life in America that have the potential to alter our mindset and our judgments. Her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and her latest novel *God help the Child* (2015) are enigmatic and thematically outstanding. *The Bluest Eye* explores the plight of a young black girl, who is sexually abused and impregnated by her alcoholic and arrogant father. She leads a loveless life of poverty and disregard. She is victimized by whites as well as the people of her own community. The novel opens with few lines from “Dick and Jane” school primer that are repeated thrice but with marked difference in punctuation and spacing. The primer is ironic and deconstructive in nature. It pictures the disciplined, healthy and blissful domestic atmosphere of the white households in contrast to the tumultuous and grim atmosphere of the black households in America. The title of this novel expresses a desperate desire to acquire the bluest pair of eyes that is nurtured in the heart of the female protagonist Pecola Breedlove. Though her wish remains unfulfilled, yet all she is left with at the end of the tale is insanity and death. Morrison’s use of this title and opening are evident of the fact that she believes in unrestricted flow of thoughts and authenticity of narration without any biased approach to fiction writing. There is tension, graveness and something mystical about the primer. A deep sense of rupture and irony is felt as soon as one approaches the opening of the novel.

In *God help the Child*, Morrison’s narration reverberates with the condition of black children in America. Though there is a chronological gap of more than four decades between the

publications of these two novels, yet the trauma of childhood remains Morrison's primary concern. The title seems to be indicative of the fact that throughout Morrison's literary journey the plight of children has not changed much and that at the pinnacle of her literary stature she hands over the authority and autonomy of the guardianship of children to God. Humans have failed children and now it's time for God to intervene. The novel opens with epigraphic convention that has been borrowed from the Bible. Such Biblical epigraphs and allusions are both inspiring and optimistic in amidst of gloomy fictional surroundings. As observed by Yvette Christiansë, "Morrison's fiction reclaims the epigraph from its function as verification, partly to attest to her mastery of fiction.... Her use of epigraph pays with the limitations of paratextuality and the function of authorization, especially authorization granted by a master discourse in the house of race."(219)

The child protagonist of *God Help the Child* called Lula Ann Bridewell leads a similar troubled childhood as Pecola. Parental injuries are present in life of both the characters along with lack of maternal affection, respect, familial love and preservation of innocence. Lula Ann falsely accuses a female school teacher of child abuse in order to win her mother's love and recognition. Though later she repents and alters her helpless life, yet she is as unhappy as Pecola in her initial childhood years. Pecola is not allowed to grow by her hostile surroundings and she dies a premature death. Whereas Lula Ann leads a life of agony, desertion and deprivation, yet does not succumb to her surroundings and redefines her role in the white American society. She escapes tragedy and emerges as a postmodern heroine of Afro-American fiction.

Pecola Breedlove's father burns his own house in a fit of anger and frustration. Pecola is taken under state custody and transferred to a foster home, while her brother Sammy runs away and her mother Pauline Breedlove abandons her. The unrest and the miserable condition of the Breedlove family corrode Pecola's psyche forever. Her black skin is abhorred by those around her. The whites nurture hatred for black skinned people, whereas the blacks too criticize their complexion and consider themselves inferior. They adore white Euro-centric standards of beauty where blue eyes, fair skin and golden hair define beauty. The black children are gifted blue-eyed dolls to play with. Pecola dislikes her skin and her eyes because she believes that only fair skin and blue eyes can win her love and respect from both family and society. Her desire is non-

realistic and culminates in her tragedy. The Shirley Temple icon on her milk tumbler and the Mary Jane candies that quenched Pecola's thirst for beauty actually deceived her.

Lula Ann Bridewell also suffered on account of her blackness. Her mother Sweetness hated her due to her color. In the opening lines of the novel Sweetness asserts that, "She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black" (GHTC 3). On one occasion she even tries to kill her daughter. Lula Ann's father Louis could not come to terms with the fact of his daughter's blackness and abandoned both Lula and her mother. She was raised under strict vigilance of Sweetness. Sweetness believed that her daughter needed to be well aware of her inferior social status. She says that, "Her color is a cross she will always carry. But it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not" (7). The guilt of childhood troubles Lula till adulthood even when she tries to make amendments by helping the woman whom she had falsely accused. She leads a troubled and disrespectful childhood due to racism, poverty and color discrimination. Her childhood is as traumatic as Pecola's but their ends are different. Sweetness confesses that in her life she had learnt a lesson according to which, "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget" (GHTC 43).

The hyperreal world that deceives Pecola Breedlove and drags her towards insanity cannot destroy Lula Ann. She pledges to elevate her life by shortening her name from Lula Ann Bridewell to just Bride. She relaunched and redefined her personality by reclaiming her dignity and enjoying the uniqueness of her blue-black skin. The "disgusted" (34) looks she received as a child were transformed to "adoring looks, stunned but hungry" (34). Bride flourishes as a strong business woman at a cosmetics company in California. She proudly exclaims that, "I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it....It's glory" (57). She is a postmodern character who identifies her strength and fights against all odds to prove her mettle. No color prejudice, or racial taunt can captivate her and torment her. She celebrates her blackness and redesigns her motives the way she wants. The Shirley Temple and Mary Jane icons that haunt Pecola cannot blind Bride from seeing her own beauty.

Pecola was victimized by the venomous celluloid world that defined beauty as per Euro-centric parameters. She was unhappy with herself and could not recognize her individuality. According to the narrator Pecola lost her power of reasoning, "Thrown, in this way, into the

binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” (TBE 35). Bride, as the Post-modern avatar of Pecola is much stronger and confident. She does not lament over the fact of her dark skin, on the contrary, she tries to find new ways of beautifying herself. The cosmetic world is ruled by Bride who has her own charismatic style. The phantasmagoric and alluring façade of the hyperreal world of cosmetic and beauty cannot devoid her of her individuality. Bride asserts, “When I woke up I reminded myself that freedom is never free. You have to fight for it. Work for it and make sure you are able to handle it” (GHTC 70). Pauline Breedlove like Sweetness in *God Help the Child* cannot love her daughter Pecola. She is a victim of celluloid fantasy and finds great satisfaction in serving the white families. She curses herself for her ugliness and poverty. She forgets her role as a mother when she says, “But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (TBE 98).

The issue of child abuse is dexterously handled by Morrison in both the novels undertaken for study. The pedophile called Soaphead Church in *The Bluest Eye* sexually exploits young girls. He lured young girls by gifting them ice creams and candies. They could not recognize his sinister motives and he playfully enjoyed touching their bodies. However, Pecola was not physically but psychologically abused by Soaphead who fuelled her unrealistic desire to acquire blue eyes. She was raped and impregnated by her own father in a fit of lust. In *God help the Child* Morrison focuses not only on child abuse but also on Sexually Stimulated Slaughter (SSS). Though Bride is not a physically abused child, yet her boyfriend Booker’s brother Adam is physically abused and later brutally slaughtered by a white child abuser. This man abducted children and as informed by the narrator, “...the details of the more recent abductions were Gothic. Apparently the children were kept bound while molested, tortured and there were amputations” (GHTC 119). When the house of the child abuser WM. V. Humboldt was searched by the police, “...a dirty mattress sporting dried blood was found in the basement along with an elaborately decorated candy tin that held carefully wrapped pieces of dry flesh, which, on not very close inspection, turned out to be small penises.” (119) was recovered from his house. Child abuse has a major impact on the lives of the characters in these two novels.

Pecola suffers direct consequences of child abuse, whereas Bride is indirectly affected by the gruesome acts of child abuse.

Towards the close of *The Bluest Eye* Pecola turns insane, miscarries her child and dies a miserable death. The materialistic and hostile social setup, strained parental bond, rape, incest, poverty, racism, and consumerism do not allow her to grow in a healthy way both physically as well as psychologically. Bride, on the other hand falsely accuses an innocent white woman in order to reclaim maternal affection and respect. She unlike Pecola is in better command of her life as she approaches adulthood. She is monetarily and physically strong. She is brutally injured by the falsely accused woman whom she visits for seeking forgiveness. Her boyfriend deserts her when he learns about her philanthropic gesture because he nurtured deep hatred for child abusers. Bride goes beyond the convention and travels in quest of her love to unfamiliar woods of northern California. She meets an accident and spends a few days with an unknown white couple and a girl called Rain. Ultimately she unites with her lover and discloses the fact of her pregnancy. Her union with him is a blissful one because they decide to give their child a protected and innocent life, “Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath.” (GHTC 175)

Bride unlike Pecola is courageous, independent, self-reliant, optimistic and self-satisfied. She is a post-modern femme fatale who knows how to counter desolation and failure that haunts her life. She can confront the worst form of challenges posed by consumerism, color-consciousness and complex relationships. The unconventionality of her post-modern attitude elevates her self-opinion and encourages her to redefine her life and not succumb to the cruel surroundings.

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