



The Marginal Body: The Abject, Carnavalesque and Grotesque A comparative study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Audra Lorde *Zami: The New Spelling of My Name*.

¹Dr. Abrity Thakur

Assistant Professor
Department of CDC,
SRMIST, Ghaziabad India.

²Sateesh Kumar Shivhare

Assistant Professor,
Department of CDC,
SRMIST, Ghaziabad India

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In the second wave of feminism the black women raised their voice against sexual and racial violence. They poignantly expressed that how they were exploited both inside and outside. How with their every step humiliation was waiting for them. The novel prize winner Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde through their novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Zami a New Spelling of My Name* presented the vivid image of the marginal bodies during the twentieth century. Both the novelists through their novels tried to show the desire of suppressed women who tried getting their own identity even in the adverse condition.

If we turned the pages of history of Africans Americans, we can see the actual image of brutality. The women were merely treated as an object. Earlier they were brought by the planters to the ship where they were compelled to sell their body to the white carnivalesque who used to scratch them like a vulture and slowly this exploitation written in their fate. Every time they forced to sleep with their masters and do whatever their masters demanded. The whites treated the black females as prostitutes and paid them for the sexual activities but those who denied performing were molested forcefully by their masters. After a long struggle and protest against sexual and racial violence finally the women were able to free themselves from the trap of white's but the problem was not end here. Even after that they were exploited in their own home by their own family members. Bell Hooks in her essay *Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism* said

“Rape was a common method of torture slavers use to subdue recalcitrant black women. The threat of rape or other physical brutalization inspired terror in the psyche of displaced African Females.”¹

In the second wave of feminism when the black women raise their voice against sexual and racial violence their strategy were bit different from the first wave, they started to express their own experience through writing. They expressed poignantly that how there were exploited both inside and outside. How with their every step humiliation is waiting for them. The Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde through their novel *The Bluest Eye* and *Zami: The New Spelling of My Name* presents the vivid image of the marginal bodies during the twentieth century. Both the novelist through their novels tried to show the desire of suppressed women who tried getting their own identity even in the adverse condition.

Morrison, an Afro American Novelist and Nobel Prize winner wrote her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970's which explores both the themes of gender as well as the racial discrimination. In the novel the young female protagonist Pecola Breedlove yearned for her blue eyes so that she also had her own identity but all her wishes were ruined when she was impregnated by her own father. Thus, Morrison through this novel tried to shows us that in 1940's where there was a kind of exodus due to the Great Depression people moved from north to south to settle down because the stock market crashed and millions of lives were on street people. It was a kind of shock and its tumult could be felt miles away and into the heart and lives of the living. Everywhere there was a chaos; riots people were killed relentlessly and amidst all this even the plantation was heavily affected. Morrison tried to shows us that when everything was settled and the black males were in the better condition the black females remained the same. Although they were not so much harassed by the whites but now, they were not safe in their own houses, now they were harassed by their own

family members. Through the character of Pecola, Morrison shows us how the black growing girls were suffering in those days and how they were not secure in their own house. So, when Morrison was asked by Thomas Le Clair about her purpose of writing this novel she said **“my works bear witness and suggests who the outlaws were, who survived under the circumstances and why, what was the legal in the community as opposed to what was the legal outside it.”**² Morrison by using the weapon of sexual violence shows us how the young girl was crushed by her own father and her whole life changed in a second. The novel is semiautobiographical so it might be possible that Morrison is sharing her own experience which she saw around her surrounding areas or come to know from her parents. She tried to show the power of masculinity in their society. Unaware about the consequence of misusing the powers, the male members abused the female members as Cholly Breedlove impregnate his daughter and switched the light of sadness in her life forever. So, the novel begins with the melancholic tone- **“There were no marigolds in the fall of 1941, we thought at the same time, that it was Pecola was having her father’s baby that the Marigold did not grow”**³

In the very opening lines of the novel Morrison reveals to the readers that Pecola was impregnated by her father and after sometime her child died because of her premature delivery and her father loses his mental stability and commits suicide. These incidents broke Pecola from inside because after lots of sufferings she gives birth to her child that did not survive in this bitter world. Morrison also shows us the picture of the challenges through which Pecola went during her pregnancy. Despite being innocent Pecola was boycotted by the black community and was forced to live at the corner of the town. However, she got the support of Claudia and Frieda who knew very well that Pecola was innocent. Both the sister used to live with Pecola until her delivery and used to take care of her. They also prayed for the wellbeing of Pecola and her safe delivery but the way she was forced to carry this pregnancy upon disappointed them that’s why Claudia said- **“it never occurred to either of us that the earth’s itself might have been too unyielding. We have dropped over seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola’s father had dropped his seed in his own plot of black dirt. Our Innocence and Faith were no productive than his lust as despair.”**⁴ As we know that Morrison was a Post-Modern writer so she used non linier plot and flashback in her novel. Thus, with the death of Pecola’s child and her father the novel moves backwards and recounts the story of three growing girls of the black community, Pecola, Claudia and Frieda. Morrison, through the character of Pecola shows us the mindset of black people that because of their color they were humiliated or dominated by the society. It is very true that racial contempt led to difficult situations for black people. Women were suffering from sexual violence mostly because of their color and to get rid of all these Pecola wanted to change herself. She also wanted to enter the world of whites where she could get attention of the people around her. The reason of ugliness always haunted in her mind so- **“Long hours she sat looking in mirrors, trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or dispraised at school, teachers and classmate alike.”**⁵

Here Morrison shows us the child psychology. It is seen in most of the children that they want attention of others. They always do something odd and funny to be in the Centre of attraction. But here in this novel the three children Pecola, Frieda and Claudia were totally ignored. Even their parents ignored them and that’s why at the time of Pecola’s rape or after that her mother tortured instead of giving comfort and solace. The sufferings and pain of female protagonist was very vividly described by Morrison whereas Bell Hooks in the endorsement of Toni Morrison said in her essay Feminism is For Everybody- **“we were told time and time again by male professors that we are not as intelligent as the males that we could not be the great thinkers, writers and so on....”**⁶ Thus, the male teachers made them realize that even being educated was not their cup of tea. It was always something else or the other which kept the black women engaged and away from education, equality and precisely because of this they suffered discrimination. To dispose of such inequality Pecola wanted ‘Blue Eyes’ which is symbol of royalty and aristocracy in this novel. Like Morrison a very famous writer of African American Literature Audre Lorde also explored the suffering and pain of black females through her novel Zami, the New Spelling of my Name. The Novel was written in 1982 with a subtitle as a bio mythography, which is an amalgamation of real and mythical elements blended into a narrative form. Lorde bit different from Morrison presented a very strong character Zami who has no interested in man because of her past and is attracted towards women. So, in the prologue of Zami, she says- **“I would like to enter a woman the way any man can, and to be entered to leave and to be left to be hot and hard and soft all at the same time in the cause of our loving. I would like to drive forward and at other time to rest or to drive, when I sit and play in the water of my bath, I love to feel the deep inside part of me sliding and folded and tender and deep.”**⁷

These lines of the novel show Audre’s desperation for women. Like other women of Afro- American society she also tried to protest against the patriarchal society as she felt suffocated and lonely there. It was not that she had this kind of feeling when she grew up but from her early mindset that this society is not for her because it is too much judgmental where she is discriminated because of her race and gender and was unable to express her feeling before it. Despite being youngest and abnormal child of her parents, she learned very quickly to read and write so her mother took her to a kindergarten. But Audre was humiliated by the teacher there and were dismissed from the school. Then her mother took her to a catholic school where the students made fun of her overweight. She was also not eligible for the class presidency and lost the election even though she was the smartest kid. These incidents left a very strong mark on Lorde’s memory. It was not that Audre Lorde suffered from this kind of situation in her early childhood but she had to suffer the same thing when she grew up. In a library she was threatened by a boy who invited her up to the roof and physically abused her. **“A boy from school much bigger than me had invited me up to the roof on my way home from the library and then threatened to break my glass if I didn’t let him stick his things between my legs.”**⁸ And this incident haunted her even after four years when she was of fourteen and she hasn’t got her menstrual cycle yet. Her mother was also worried because of women around her started gossiping and Audre herself thought that it was the result of that forceful physical connection. She was scared and bit unable to share this feeling with anyone and felt very lonely. But when she was of fifteen, she got her first menstrual

cycle and at that time she realized that she was not pregnant. Because of lack of knowledge at that time she was so much afraid so she was looking for a friend with whom she could share all her feelings but there was no one whom she could trust. This aloofness and loneliness always gave trouble to Audre and gradually she started detaching from society as well as from people. She needed someone who could understand her feelings and make her smile but instead of that she always received humiliation. But after sometimes she found a girl of her own age and in her company, she felt fearless and became extrovert. She closely connected with her and became her first true friend **“Gennie was the first person in my life that I was ever conscious of loving. She was my first true friend.”**⁹

Audre and Gennie live together more than a friend and used to share each and everything but unfortunately after sometime Gennie committed suicide and Audre was trapped in loneliness once again and moved to work in a hospital where she had an affair with a boy named Peter. She tried to come out of her aloofness which Gennie had given her and when she made Peter, for her mental relaxation she established physical relation with him and later on she conceived too. But Peter left her in difficult situation and moved on. Later on, Audre aborted the child but had very bitter experience and thus her hatred towards man grew and she leaned toward women. Her experience with Gennie was good while with Peter was bad. And those bad experiences forced her to move towards lesbianism where according to her she was free to share all her suppressed feelings and desires. Later on, she established relations with Ginger and Muriel. She says about her relationship with Ginger that- **“until the very moment that our naked body touched in that old brass bed that creaked in the insulted sun porch on Walker Road, I had no idea what I was doing there. I had no idea what making love to other women want. I only knew dimly it was something that was different from anything I have ever done before.”**¹⁰ Audre felt a unique pleasure in the company of Ginger, she had never felt before. The first experience of exploring the female anatomy was something grotesque and pleasing at the same time. The terrain on which Lorde was moving knew no boundaries. Their whole cosmos narrowed down to a small brass bed where two bodies immersed in one another as if they were inseparable. The erotic pleasure which she felt is expressed in Zami- **“Loving Ginger that night was like coming home to a joy I was meant for and I only wandered silently, how I had not always known that it would be so.”**¹¹ In her essay ‘Use of Erotic: The Erotic as Power’, Lorde described Eroticism as a power which lies ‘deeply in female’ as it was lying in Lorde but as she was able to deceive the society and those people with whom she wanted to share her feelings she suppressed all her feelings and desire. She categorized this eroticism into four parts 1) The Erotic as a Personal Power 2) The Erotic in a particular society 3) The Erotic as a Political Force 4) Beyond Pornography. In the first part when she describes The Erotic as a Personal Power, she says-**“The Erotic is a measure between the beginning of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings.”**¹² But when she described erotic in the patriarchal society, she was furious and so she said that in the patriarchal society of western, eroticism became defamed because of the sexual harassment of women. The hate redness of Audre towards male community never allowed her to express her physical desire before any male partner and being a girl when she tried to express, she received only wiliness and aloofness where as her experience with female partners are very good. When she moved to New York she found a partner Muriel with whom she was committed. Muriel was not only a lesbian but also an activist who used to participate in queer sexuality. She used to meet with the gay girls of different races and different social classes and tell them about other gay women, So Lorde says-**“in the bars we meet the women with whom we would have had no other contact had we not all been gay.”**¹³

Audre in the company of Muriel did not only explore the female body or the eroticism but was also able to women who had love for other women. They only wanted to bring the women like her to their independent world where they not only shared their emotions and feelings but also lived independently and happily without tolerating any torture or harassment. Audre the writer as well as the female protagonist of the novel moved towards lesbianism as she thought that there, she is free to express herself. She also thought that a woman can better understand another woman because both were going through the same difficult situation. Audre always felt suffocated in this patriarchal society and tried to search a place where no one could judge her on the basis of gender and race and she could freely share things with others. In one word she tried to quest her own identity and lesbianism was the only platform where she gets all these things so she left this world and moved to that world.

To conclude the two novelists Tony Morrison and Audre Lorde presented the vivid image of cruel black society where the black women even after the freedom from the clutches of whites suppressed in their own society. Both the novels are sort of autobiography where the writers share their own experience. The Bluest Eye is semi-autobiographical whereas Audre Lorde called her novel Zami: A New Spelling of My Name as bio mythography which combines history, biography and myth. In both the work the characters Pecola and Audre exploited at the very young and both were suffered lot because of their color and gender but the difference is that the same experience given them different result as the led their life in a different way. Pecola was weak and has lack of education so even after the support of Claudia and Farida she was not able to survive and died whereas Audre was very strong and educated so even after so many ups and downs in her life she was able to make her own identity by turning herself toward lesbianism.

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