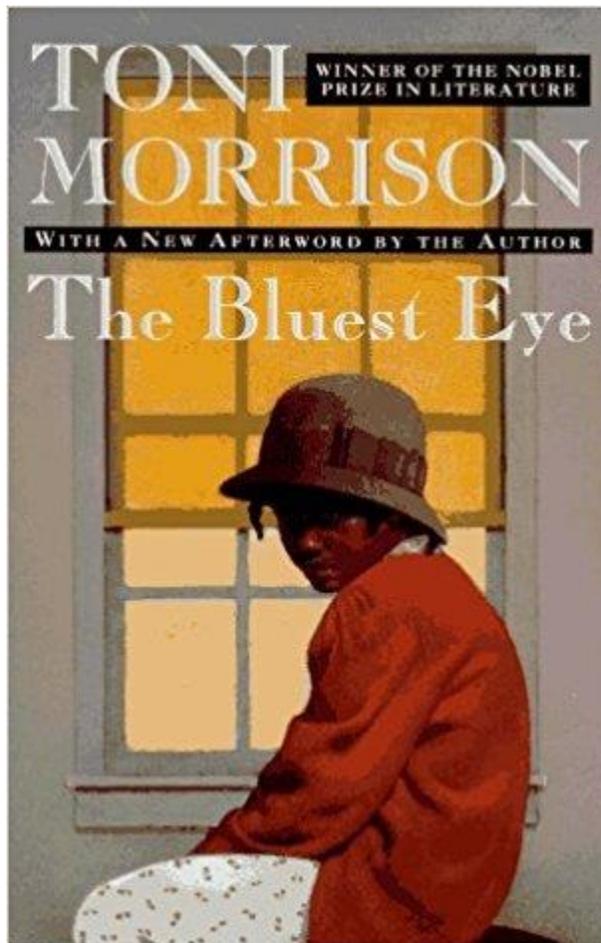


**Black Literature**  
**Quest for Self in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison**

M. Tamil Arasi and L. Ravi Shankar

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## Abstract

The significance of look in constructing identity and subjectivity of African-Americans is highlighted by Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Toni Morrison redefines beauty and the identity crisis of the black women. The identity crisis makes a sense of Self-loathing, and inferiority in the mind. This situation creates the Quest for Self. The most insulting situation for a person is when that person is neglected as invisible to the viewer. The protagonist in the novel faced this type of neglected situation. The White society created their own concept of beauty and makes it universal for the people of all colours, society and races. The character in the novel Claudia, shows a better future for the Black race. Morrison portrays her woman from zero image to independent individuality where the expectation of triumph works.

**Keywords:** Tony Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Quest, Beauty, Racism, Freedom, Identity.

## *The Bluest Eye*

This paper discusses one of the important topics that is universal. Toni Morrison is an American novelist, essayist, editor, teacher and professor Emeritus at Princeton University. In 1998 Morrison won Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award. '*The Bluest Eye*' was originally published in 1970. This book is one of the popular works of Morrison's life. Morrison, a single mother of two sons, wrote the novel while she taught at Howard University.

## Identity Crisis

Identity crisis can be defined as a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a particular people or community face lot of problems in a society. A person's sense of Identity becomes insecure, typically due to change in their expected aims or role in society. The main theme of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is the quest for individual identity and the influences of the family as well as quest for identity in community. Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove belong to one family. They are all Black people who were moving to the north in search of greater opportunities.

## The Breedlove Family and Pecola

The Breedlove family is a group of people under the same roof. Cholly, is the father of the family who is a drunkard and abusive man. He abused his own daughter Pecola, who is informed her mother Paulina, but she never minds her daughter words. So, she felt like missing her identity with parents too. Pauline belongs to White family and continues to favour them over her Biological family. Pecola is a little Black girl with low self-esteem. She felt like ugly and Imperfect of '*Blue Eyes*', even though every night she prays to god, next day she is working up with blue eyes. The title of the book suggests the dominant ideology of Racism, the class exploitation and cultural hegemony it means dominance of one group. The white people are tolerating the black people among the society.

## To Become One Among the White People

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The protagonist of the novel not only needs blue eyes, she also wants to become one among the white people. She is taught about white which is synonymous with beautiful. This paper deals with critical exploration mainly towards the African Americans racial identity and its effects. The author brings out the psychological damage done to a black girl (Protagonist of the novel) who has low self Esteem. The novel focuses on Pecola who was longing for blue eyes. At last the author shows the psychological impact done to her life. She has been that taught in it white is only considered has beautiful whereas black is considered as ugliness, and she believes in the reason behind her being rejected everywhere. However, Claudia, the young girl narrator, at the very beginning of the novel, describes herself as indifferent to both white and black people.

### **Overcoming Problems**

At first Pecola faced problems in Maureen, hates light-Skinned because Maureen appear beautiful because he belongs to white race. During her school days Maureen was always teasing her and criticize of they as belonging to back community. In that time, she lost her identity in her school days. In this novel the black people's identity is constructed by the gaze of white people that controls their code of behaviours. *The Bluest Eye*, Panopticon which means in old Greek (all observe) a visual devise of imposing and accepting racial identity of inferiority. One men can be easily identified what they are easily by other men's look. Black people are identified negatively regardless of their origin and they are also without raising a question they accept and internalize the unfairly ideology through total negation and self-hatred.

### **Abusive and Controlling Parents**

Morrison begins the novel with reference to Dick and Jane reading primer. At first, she did without punctuation, without spacing between the words. The Reader finds a family; mother, family, sister, and brother, but key elements are missing. Simply she described that her Father is a drunkard and mother is a self-loathing woman. Pecola is trying to escape a tragic world without love that is too insane. Her parents are abusive and negligent. The reader is told that Pecola's mother thought she was ugly from the time of birth. Her family too had failed to provide her with identity, love, security, and socialization, which are essential for any child's development (Samuel 13). She struggles to find her infertile soil leading to the analysis of a life of sterility. Like the marigolds planted that year, Pecola never grew. They limit the freedom to both beauty and racism, but perhaps running parallel, create anger, self-loathing and shame are most important one in identity crisis. In the novel, racist attitude towards the black is shown as a lack of recognition; the idea of blackness is removed human identity.

### **No Identity in the Eyes of Some White People**

A white shopkeeper does not notice Pecola as a human being with an identity. Even though she has noticed "lurking in the eyes of all white people" (Morrison 48). "He does not saner; because of him there is nothing to see" (Morrison 48). She noticed that the shopkeeper did not recognize her. He believed in the white standard of visual attractiveness. When Pecola goes to buy her favourite Mary Jane candy there. Mr. Yakobowski cannot acknowledge her presence and refuses to look at her. He said that he does not see her because there is nothing to see, he

said. That was a total negation of Pecola. Beauty is a subjective concept; every individual maintains a different perspective on what is beautiful.

One day Pecola and her friends all black encounter a white girl, Maureen Peal, who after the tiffin with the girls insists they criticize,

“I am cute! And you are ugly! Black and ugly Black e mos. I am cute” (Morrison 73)

### **A Language That Evokes Slavery**

In this scene, two ideas are presented: the idea of blackness and the idea of beauty. The girls are struck by Maureen’s insistence of superiority. Pauline’s story is described to show that the concept of beauty is a process described in a language that evokes image of slavery.

“She stripped her mind, bound it” (Morrison 121).

Morrison presents a clear layout not only for the psychological effects of those who fall victim to romantic love, beauty or racism, but also to unite all three of these ideas. But the parallel between beauty and racism is most interesting in their shared effects. She goes to the store for Mary Jane, a symbol of whiteness. When the separateness is noticed, when no longer is “the world a part of her” (Morrison 48), a loss of love occurs.

### **Idea of Separateness**

Another interesting feature is the idea of separateness. Maureen moves “safe on the other side” of the street (Morrison 73), separating herself physically from the black girls before asserting her superiority verbally. Morrison uses a popular figure from 1940’s Mr. Henry arrives at the Mac Teer’s house, greeting Claudia and Frieda with:

“Hello there, you must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Ginger Roger” (Morrison 16)

### **Role of Movies**

Both characters are white, leading the reader to assume that white women were used to describe pretty girls of other colors. Others don’t have any identity. Films play an important role in the self-degradation of Black people. The beauty standard that Pecola feels she must live up to causes her to have an identity crisis. Society’s standard has no place for Pecola, unlike her “high yellow dream child” classmate. Maureen Peals, who fits the mold (Morrison 62).

“She enchanted the entire school... black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girl’s toilet... She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria- they flocked to the table of her choice” (Morrison 62-63).

In contrast, Pecola’s classmates insult her black skin by chanting. “Black e mo Black e mo ya daddy sleeps necked/ stch ta ta stch la ta” (Morrison 65)

### **Establishing Self-esteem**

Pecola believes that the cruelty she witnessed and experienced is connected to how she is facing the problem in the society. In other words, Pecola’s definition of her self-esteem is established by those who see her. This is how she sees herself. “Long hour she sat looking at the mirror trying to discover the secret of the ugliness”. (Morrison 54) Through this discovery she

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seeks an escape into the fantasy world. She is mostly plays with white dolls and with her blue eyes. Her childhood days she believes that blue eyes only change everything in her life. If she had blue eyes, she would look like a prettiest girl in this world.

### **Human Psychology**

Pecola thinks that how we see the world is determined by eyes' colour, but it is indeed related to human psychology. One day Pecola enters into Geraldine's home that time Geraldine forces her to leave with words that hurt deeply sayin "Get out... You nasty little back bitch. Get out of my house" (Morrison 92).

She is a very delicate character because of her young age, but her delicacy lies even more in her innocence. Cholly is described as most irresponsible father as the white society. As he is black, he is ugly and slave of the white people. He is making violence suffer of the rape his own daughter Pecola. He was wrongly adopted the white people concept in negative way. The characters like Maureen and Gearldine are the other examples of self-loathing. Gearldine accepts the white standard of beauty and cleanliness. They also talk about house cleaning. Maureen is the symbol of pride, because is lighter skinned girl than the other black girls. Pecola called her mother from Mrs. Breedlove. Pauline actually shows her self-hatred. She does not like poor, dark skinned black children like Pecola because she hates her own colour. It looks as if it is not easy to have respectable coloured people. Fear of suffering she sees in the eyes of black girls like Pecola. Maureen is lighter than other black girls, and she shows her pride not being a black. She even does not hesitate to call others as black and ugly. She is also wealthier. She successfully achieves the superior status in the society. She is the symbol of slavery and oppression of the whites.

At the end of the novel, Pecola gets a friend and gets the blue eyes but only through her imagination and insanity. Pecola has been destroyed by racism that wholly negates the aspiration of black skinned, brown eyed people. The divesting power of power of racial contempt and self-hatred caused Pecola to literally self-destruct in her quest for love, self-worth and identity.

### **To Conclude**

Beauty is a phenomenon which calls for an instant, complex process of recognition, misidentification, projection and elimination. *The Bluest Eye* makes the experiences of beauty an easy analogue for racial classification, a process of self-definition. This mostly deals with identity, racism, cultural of black society. Morrison adjures the female members of the community and exhorts black women to return to reality and rejection the illusionary tendencies of media presentation. The main theme of the novel is, individual identity and the influences of the family and the community in the quest. The hegemonic ideology is based on white gaze and black blindness. The novel tries to deconstruct the hegemonic ideology and racially hierarchical identity constructed for the twentieth-century African-Americans.

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