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White Beauty Standard in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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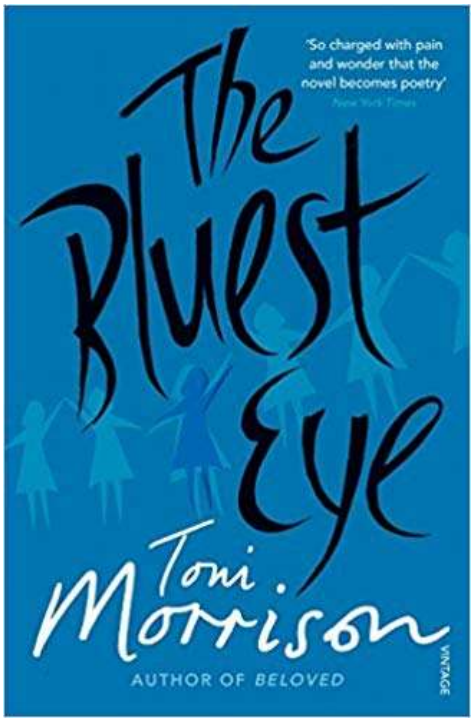

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Abstract

The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's first novel in which the author challenges Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Morrison also argues that if whiteness is used as a standard of beauty or anything else, then the value of blackness is decreased and this novel works to demolish that tendency. Although the slave system was got rid of later, yet the black people could not stay away from the racial discrimination. Morrison reveals the aggression of the white culture and that the black culture is the victim of the white cultural hegemony. With the powerful influence of white mass media, school education and the community culture, the black of every level in the American society have long held the standard of value that white color and blue eyes are beautiful, the color of black is ugly. In it, the Nobel Prize winner tells the story of a young girl convinced

that her blackness makes her ugly and worthless. If only she had blue eyes, she thinks, her life would be different. The reasons of Pecola and her fellows' tragedy are mostly lying in two aspects: the white cultural aggression and the assimilation of white aesthetic standards by the by the black themselves. Such kind of cultural erosion and aesthetic alienation has brought the black into a world of endless misery. Toni Morrison as a black writer is crying for the awakening for the whole black nation. She wants her fellows to rectify their misunderstanding. All people are created to be equal. The white have their strength and merits, so do the black because all are making great contribution to the world. Social construction like beauty standard is no more thought to be happened automatically rather than they are guided carefully to create social meaning to social significance. Social scientist Giddens theorizes the formation process of social construction. He thinks intentional and authoritative continuous follow of signification, domination and legitimization can lead to a formation of a new social order. Michel Foucault opines that continuous discursive practice results in discursive formation of a social construction. Social construction is not structured meaninglessly. American white people are manifestly benefited from 'white beauty standard' in the past and today from the profit made by the hundreds of years of free labour and now from multi-billion dollar fashion industry. For all races and for all individuals, it is essential to fully understand how mass culture touches, influences and shapes our values and beliefs - only after fully understanding that, people can strive to fight and grow to their fullest potential.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, White Beauty Standards, Racial Oppression, Capitalism

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison challenges Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Morrison also argues that if whiteness is used as a standard of beauty or anything else, then the value of blackness is decreased and this novel works to demolish that tendency. In demonstrating pride in being black, this writer does not simply portray positive images of blackness. Instead, she focuses on the damage that the black women characters suffer through the construction of white beauty standard in a racialised society. As Gurleen Grewal also argues that "merely reversing perceived 'ugliness' to beautiful blackness "is not enough, for such counter-rhetoric does not touch the heart of the matter: the race-based class structure upheld by dominant norms and stereotypes" (21). In the process of structuration, whiteness is first signified, then it dominates over black people and finally gets legitimized over discursive practices.

Toni Morrison depicts the tragic effect of imposing white ideals of beauty in the developing female identity of a young African-American girl during the early 1940s. Morrison portrays the psychological devastation of Pecola Breedlove who searches for love and acceptance in a world that denies and does not value people of her race (blacks). The whites established European standard of beauty: white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. This Eurocentric standard of beauty which the black girl lacked was used in judging and

qualifying beauty, thus causing blacks to develop disdain for their own black skin as it counters the dominant ideals.

Set in Toni Morrison's hometown of Lorain, Ohio, Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye was published in 1970. The novel tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl convinced of her own ugliness who desires nothing more than to have blue eyes. Through Pecola Breedlove, Morrison vividly unfolds African Americans' responses and reactions to the overpowering standards of beauty in Western culture: rejection, alienation, self-hatred, and inevitable destruction. The nine-year-old narrator in this novel, Claudia, points out in the beginning of the novel that fear of poverty and homelessness is a more prevalent day-to-day worry in her community than fear of discrimination, which she declaims "probably because it (discrimination) was abstract. But the concreteness of homelessness and poverty was another matter" (Morrison 11). However, the adult Claudia many years later comes to realize that "it is the land of the entire country that was hostile to marigolds that year" (Morrison 164); it is also the land, not mere poverty and homelessness that dominate the fate of Pecola. Racism affects people's lives in subtle yet profound ways by distorting common beauty and standards of happiness in The Bluest Eye. Morrison tries to show how cultural ideals based on skin color and physical features function as tools of racial oppression.

The novel starts with the description of an ideal white family but in the near-parodic style of a school reading primer in order to signify whiteness, where Dick and Jane and their lovely parents living in a nice and comfortable house with a lovely dog and a cat. The Dick and Jane text functions as "the hegemonizing force of an ideology ([focused by] the supremacy of 'the bluest eye') by which a dominant culture reproduces [its] hierarchical power structure[s]" (Grewal 24). As Donald B. Gibson also argues,

> [t]he Dick and Jane text implies one of the primary and most insidious ways that the dominant culture exercises its hegemony, through the educational system. It reveals the role of education in both oppressing the victim – and more to the point – teaching the victim how to oppress her own black self by internalising the values that dictate standards of beauty (20).

Morrison's allusion to the story of Dick and Jane in a sort of preface to the book, Morrison has written three versions of "Dick and Jane", which was at that time nationally recognized as a children's primary-reader story.

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthe

familymotherfaherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappy. (Morrison 2).

Morrison uses this to "juxtapose the fiction of the white educational process with the realities of life for many black children" (Klotman 123). The first version is clear, straight, rendered in standard English — correct and white. It represents the seemingly ideal, rich, white family, which impinges upon the lives of the black children and their families while at the same time excluding them. The second version, while it repeats the message exactly, is less clear, yet still comprehensible although written without proper capitals or punctuation. The third, in which the letters completely run together, seems to signify nothing, yet it represents the home of Pecola, where her mother and her father curse and fight, her brother runs away and this black girl herself wishes with all her soul for blue eyes. Just as the Dick-and-Jane primer teaches children how to read, it also guides the children's interpretation of the world. Pecola learns to recognize "what is beauty" and "I am ugly and miserable, or at least my family is" (Morrison 5) through the reading of the story of Dick and Jane, because home for her is not the green and white picture-perfect house of white myth. It is worth noticing that through this public education, the local culture is being oppressed and a seemingly innocent national ideal is being given the highest status.

Knowledge of American history is an important factor in understanding *The Bluest Eye*. The novel was written during the 60s and 70s, but is set during the 40s. Despite the setting, her novel reflects the happenings of the late 60s and early 70s in which African American culture was becoming well defined and recognized as a part of the once dominantly white American culture. However, racism was and still is quite common in American society and in fact, racism was taking new forms in 1940s America. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison took a different approach to the traditional white-versus-black racism. She acknowledged that most people are unaware of the racism that exists within a culture and often the racism that exists within themselves.

A fertile tradition of research in sociology and related fields has studied the relationship between status and beauty. These studies have demonstrated that attractive people are more successful both socially and economically. This is generally attributed to a "halo effect": attractiveness produces positive expectations, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This paradigm makes a strong case for the social importance of attractiveness. However, it does not account for variations in beauty standards, and it assumes an overly simple unilinear causal relation between beauty and status. The relation between beauty and status may also work the other way: signs of status often come to be regarded as attractive. Such effects are also visible in beauty standards. The process by which status characteristics are imbued with aesthetic value leads to downward diffusion of standards. This "trickle down" mechanism is central to historical analyses of beauty ideals.

The public education has imposed a certain kind of image of a happy life on the children of a local culture. The novel then switches to the influence of popular culture on the African-

American community, and an icon of the good, of the true, and of the beautiful— Shirley Temple— jumps out.

In gender studies and feminist theory, beauty standards are also interpreted as socially constructed rather than given. In this perspective, such standards are a form of control. The "beauty myth" reproduces gender inequalities by propagating unrealistic beauty ideals for women (Wolf 95). Gender scholars – like popular discourse – generally point to the media as the main culprit in the dissemination of beauty standards. This has produced a wealth of studies analyzing gender representations in various media outlets.

This perspective enables us to re-conceptualise and refine the relation between beauty and social inequality, by pointing at the ways in which inequalities are connected with the human body. It predicts that gender is the main factor in the shaping of taste variations, and that beauty standards are highly morally charged – more so than other aesthetic standards.

Race also is an important factor in the relation between beauty, the body, and social inequality. Racial hierarchies influence beauty standards, both globally and within nations (Hunter 2002; Jones 2008). However, ethnic groups typically develop beauty standards particular to their own ethnic group.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison demonstrates the connection between capitalism and the construction of desire in the community when she points out the basic components of the society and media like commercials, literary works, kid's toys etc. Capitalism in a postmodern society typically hinges on manufacturing new utilities and desires to function within a racist domain. In this domain, the racist idealization of whiteness has intense sexual and economic associations.

> If we closely review the adoration of whiteness in the society portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*, we notice the bond between capitalism and racism. *The Bluest Eye* reveals just how the patterns of internalized racism utilize the authority of postmodern capitalism, its power and methods of representation like kids gadgets, advertisements etc. to create unconscious desires and fears; and illustrates this interconnection between beauty, racism, and capitalism in numerous incidents narrated in the novel.(Khan)

A good example is Claudia's splitting up the Raggedy Ann doll. She actually attempts to dissect the core of the framework of racism through ripping it apart: "I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped only me" (Morrison 20). Claudia defies the adoration of white beauty that has been put into practice by commercials, a tool of postmodern capitalism, to produce desire for it. But she fails to understand the politics of socially engineered idealization, and wrongly locates it inside the material object, that is, the doll.

Beauty standard is always built upon socially fabricated values. Claudia's perplexity concerning the representation of beauty refers to that politics. This also is associated with Freud's idea of the unconscious treatment of words as real things (Freud 147). This is why Claudia tries to transform symbolic representation of the doll's beauty into the real and cannot accept it as a form of external representation. When it comes to cinema, according to Jean Louis Baudry, we see a similar transformation of the symbolic codes into real properties. Such representations are often incorrectly recognized as perceptions in the postmodern consumer community (315). In *The Bluest Eye*, television and movie both play a crucial role in modifying the framework of internalized racism using such make-believe representations as genuine impressions. Pauline is governed by the idea of beauty and ideal love when she finds them as perceptions from movies. Morrison here shows how the notion of 'beauty' can be manipulated by popular media and film to produce racist self-hatred by compelling females feel insecure and awful about their figure and color. The ideology of all the characters in *The Bluest Eye* is influenced pretty much by such idealization of whiteness as beauty in a consumer community. In Pauline's case, "she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty" (Morrison 122). In another context, the female-to-female relationship turns out to be further complicated when the heterosexual desire is mediated by it. Inside this politics of 'beauty industry', women are entirely commoditized and considered as mere objects of desire. Blackness ends up being a form of economic incapacity. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison repeatedly demonstrates, and draws our attention to the prevailing idea that the poverty and blackness of the Breedlove family is related to their economic incapacity, and Pecola is the fundamental embodiment of ugliness related to this economic incapacity.

A girl child is described as a female child between infancy and early adulthood. During this period of the development of the girl child, she is under the custody and supervision of adults who may be her parents or guardians and siblings who are older and more mature than she is. The girl child is easily influenced by her experiences as she develops. She models her behaviour during this development process though observations and imitations of those she depends on, and her physical, mental and emotional development start and reach their peak within this stage.

In attempting to establish the relationship between the society and the girl child, it is important to know how she child is received and related with in her contemporary society. What are the struggles, challenges and oppression faced by the girl child? What are the factors that foist on the girl child such challenges and oppression? From the family circle to the public sphere, the girl child has suffered much hardship and has been greatly dehumanized. This is due to the fact that she is regarded as inferior to her brother. She is devalued and as Buchi Emecheta portrays her, she is a second class citizen in a society ruled by male chauvinism. In especially most African societies, the girl child has been consigned to an inferior status for which she constantly wears a daunted image. This inferiority is as a

result of the patriarchal ideology in the society which bestows undue self-importance on the male child. The result of this is that, men do everything to undermine the women in order to arbitrarily institute value and ideologies in the society. The African society and the diaspora is a society with a tradition that bestows importance to the male folk, neglecting the female folks. This patriarchal ideology has influenced the way the girl characters are projected by male writers in their literary texts. In most literary works, female characters always wear one of these images: prostitute, girlfriend, courtesans, and workers. They construct the girl character as a passive and inconsequential object. The male writers communicated a picture of the girl child as one whose destiny is subject to the whims of her male folk.

Klotman comments that "whether one learns acceptability from the formal educational experience or from cultural symbols, the effect is the same: self-hatred" (124). Very early in the novel, Pecola shows excessive enthusiasm for Shirley Temple, which can be seen from her fascination with Frieda's blue-and-white Shirley Temple mug and unstoppable milk-drinking from that mug — three quarts of milk a day. This can be interpreted as a part of her desire to internalize the values of white culture, a symbolic moment that foreshadows her desire to possess blue eyes. In yearning to be Shirley Temple, Pecola denies her own identity, "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (Morrison 34). Pecola connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. Surely, Pecola suffers most from white beauty standards and this hopeless desire leads ultimately to her madness.

"As these black people do not possess a place in the domain of white beauty, they derive a complicated impression of beauty from humiliating people of their own community" (Khan 2).

In this way Pecola and her family turn out to be the focal point of the whole community's self-hatred. Moreover, by indicating that Pecola's ugliness help everyone else feel beautiful, and her weakness make others feel potent, Morrison tries to reveal how such idealization predominantly depends on the degradation of an 'Other'. Throughout *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove becomes a revalorized entity not just for the whites but also for the blacks. She turns out to be the embodiment of failure both racially and economically when she tries to buy a candy from a white American male. He looks at her:

> Somewhere between retina and object, vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses the need not to waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see (Morrison 48).

Thus, her ego lacks any sort of validation in the eye of the 'Other' as her existence is totally unrecognized; she is crushed into an instance of self-defiance, a vacuum signifying

nothing, a total absence of acknowledgment as a human being. Pecola knows very well how this failure of her ego is related to her blackness: "All things in her are in flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes". (Morrison 49).

Not only she is despised for being black, but her blackness also results in being the fixed object of a perpetual gaze of the white men which forces her presence into the position of an object of cultural desire detrimentally. Under this constant gaze the ego of the black girl is completely shattered, and she is forced to feel awful for her color, her body, even for her whole existence. She knows that the whole community has its eye on her even when she is alone. She creates a new, imaginary concept of 'self' which she finds in the eyes of the other people, and she begins to believe that image, as in a mirror, to be her true self. When she becomes pregnant, this image gets associated with a sense of perverse sexism and guilt. This guilt is directly related to the blackness of Pecola and her family. In fact, she turns out to be a symbol of 'guilt' and 'ugliness' in the eye of the community. In a complex way, "the community needs this image of hers to feel better in comparison to her debased position. Pecola's blackness and pregnancy both serve this purpose" (Khan 3).

This further validates the idea of white beauty through self-defiance. This concentration on the gaze of the white man shows how subjects are maneuvered not only on an imaginary level but also on a visual level. Pecola desires to have a pair of blue eyes, because she has a delusional belief that if she obtains blue eyes, she will be beautiful and can reverse the relationship that reduced her to a hollow image in the eyes of the white 'Other'. This obsessive desire ends up in a psychotic attempt to a total denial of her existence: "Please God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear". She squeezed her eye shut. Little parts of her body faded away" (Morrison 45). This suggests an almost psychotic withdrawal from the domain of representations through the denial of subjectivity and body.

As mentioned by Freud in his book *The Unconscious*, the subject's psychological world is shattered and later re-created in an imaginary, unreal fantasy in the first phase of psychosis (147). In Pecola's instance, we notice the very same thing as she first makes an effort to destroy her identity as a black subject, and then pose an obsessive attempt to obtain blue eyes. This blackness and psychotic desire to obtain blue eyes have a relationship with the socioeconomic incapacity of Pecola's family, as their homelessness brings them down as nonhuman objects. According to Lacan, "The-name of- the-father' links the real order with the symbolic order. But in psychosis, the subject can no longer deal with 'the name-of-the-father" (70). Once this relationship is torn apart, the subject is then manipulated by the discourse of the 'Other'. In Pecola's case, her family's economic condition together with her blackness both eliminates her from the central symbolic order of white consumer culture.

In the framework of racism, the middle class African-Americans accept the represented associations between blackness and excessive sexuality. According to Davis Charles, one of the primary manifestations of developing 'obsessive neurosis' is the desire to repress the irrepressible sexuality through sophistication and differentiation (*Slave's Narrative* 1985). Such a form of 'obsessive neurosis' is exposed by Toni Morrison in the character of Geraldine. This stems forward from an obsessive effort to stay in line with the predominant social 'Other'. Thus, Morrison gives a psychoanalytic layout of the internalized racism of Geraldine's class. The racist mindset of Geraldine's class, the accepted interconnection between blackness and over sexuality, and a strong urge to stay separated from any sense of sullied blackness is associated with an obsessive fear which turns them into 'obsessive stereotypes' whose only thought is to renounce blackness by any means. But when this obsessive desire falters, it does not destroy the racist mindset; rather further tones up into a dejection resulting in deeper obsessive delusions. We find it in Geraldine's obsessive attempt to turn the skin of her son white:

> In the winter his mother put Jergens Lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen. Even though he was light-skinned, it was possible to ash. The line between color and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant. (Morrison 87)

In the long run, this obsessive fear of any indication of blackness isolates Geraldine from her own community. Thus, the psychological hierarchy of the middle class blacks is fed by racist behavior producing from their obsessive fear of discovering themselves in the realm of the terrifying real. This obsessive fear compels them to surrender to the racist discourse established by the 'Other'. Now black people are dominated by the whiteness.

In her article "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power", Sandra Lee Bartky examines the construction of Western femininity by applying Michel Foucault's theories about the production of subjectivity in modern societies. Foucault argues that "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies" (Bartky 62). However, Bartky recognises that Foucault does not consider gender differences and "is blind to [the] disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" (63-64). She further argues that analysing disciplinary practices that produce feminine bodies reveals sexism operating in Western patriarchal society (64). However, in doing so, Bartky does not consider racial differences. She argues that –

> the larger disciplines that construct a 'feminine' body out of a female one are by no means race- or class-specific. There is little evidence that women of color or working class women are in general less committed to the incarnation of an ideal femininity than their more privileged sisters. (Bartky 72)

It may be true that beauty is a central focus of many women, and according to Naomi Wolf, this is a very powerful myth (49). Yet, since the ideal of beauty is and has been largely depicted as a woman with light skin and blue eyes, it is even less possible for women of colour than for white women to achieve this ideal. As Paul C. Taylor argues, "a white dominated culture has racialised beauty, in that it has defined beauty per se in terms of white beauty, in terms of the physical features that the people we consider white people are more likely to have" (17). Therefore, in the process of trying to achieve beauty, as Taylor further argues, "the experience of a black woman … differs from the experiences of … Jewish and Irish women" (20). This can clearly be seen in the ways that the black women characters in Morrison's novel suffer in trying to conform to Western standards of beauty.

The Bluest Eye concentrates on the black African-Americans' desire to leave their own value system and start adopting Eurocentric values materialism, capitalist success and beauty and how those all desires remain 'unrealistic', 'destructive' and 'un-necessary' (Kohler 40). The black community in the novel is continually devalued by the Eurocentric values, the popular culture presents. The Blacks remain to have the wrong color for success in life, uneducated, poor, and void of emotions; therefore, when they try to adopt the Eurocentric values, it means they do nothing because they are never the same (Kohler 42). By following the white concept of beauty, Pecola thinks that her parents, schoolmates, and also the teachers will treat her better. As it is stated in the novel, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We must not do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison 29). However, regardless these stuffs, Pecola still is unaware that though (in case) her eyes were changed into blue she would still be regarded as a black, poor, and ugly. Nothing would change, obviously. "No one else will see her blue eyes. But she will. And she will live happily ever after" (Morrison 155). It means that she still considered as ugly and black, the blue eyes she already has do not change her identity that she is black and ugly. Again, Pecola still becomes the object of the mockery by the White society, of course because of her all tragic life; including, the sexual abuse done by her own father, her poverty, her blackness, and some other aspects. Morrison presents Pecola with her weaknesses. She accepts her position as a victim in the community around her. She does not defend herself against her abusive schoolmates. She stays quite when Junior lies to his mother that Pecola has injured Geraldine's precious cat. She remains so weak in the novel (Kohler 40).

The racial stratification is also presented clearly throughout the novel. Pecola's and some other black characters' humanity are rejected by the society. It is in accordance with Yancy (2005) who states that the society is divided along two racial lines or two societies, one Black and one white. Black children cannot escape the pervasive presence of the dominant society's cultural icons of female beauty, for instance Shirley Temple. The inculcation of blackness as a "negative signifier" in the minds of the black community causes the destruction and madness of Pecola (Tally 14). More importantly, Pecola is positioned in the space between the black and white humiliating communities which whom she is unaccepted and alienated from both. Sincerely, the Whites beauty standard plays a significant

role to make Pecola and Claudia, perceive that a black is ugly; and this beauty perception undeniably cannot be separated from the colonialism effects. In perceiving the idea of beauty, Pecola and Claudia have different perceptions. Pecola is the young black character who concerns more about her physical beauty, especially her eyes; while Claudia is not too concern on.

> As long as Pecola looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow, she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. (Morrison 38)

Therefore, Pecola believes that if she successfully has the blue eyes, their classmates and teachers will treat her better. However, she believes that "to have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time… 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" (Morrison 39).

The novel is divided into three sections: Spring, winter and summer, detailing the development of the girl child through experiences during these periods. It begins in the fall of 1941 after the depression in Lorain Ohio. In the autumn, the Macteers take in a boarder Mr. Henry Washington. Also, they take in Pecola Breedlove; a teenage girl who experiences hardship and her parents (Cholly and Pauline Breedlove) fight each other consistently. As a result of her father's drunken state, he burns their house, this putting his family outdoors -

> Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside down his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors. Mrs. Breedlove was staying with the woman she worked for; the boy, Sammy was with other family; and Pecola was to stay with us. Cholly was in Jail. (Morrison 17)

The main black characters are depicted as various and very different characters located in three hierarchical families: "first Geraldine's (a counterfeit of the idealised white family), … then the MacTeers and at the bottom [of the social order], the Breedloves" (Ogunyemi 113). The novel shows how these black characters respond to the dominant culture differently and this refutes easy binary social distinctions.

The narrator lets us know that Pecola's life at home in difficult. The narrator describes the Breedloves as poor, black and ugly. Her parents engaged themselves in constant fight disregarding their children's presence. Sammy, Pecola's brother reacts to this by running away from home. It is stated that Sammy "was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty seven times." (43) Pecola, unlike Sammy, stays at

home. She is unable to run of her lacking consciousness. She reacts by attempting to disappear, but she can't. She later begins to think that if she had blue eyes, her parents would be nice to her, would respect her presence and not fight each other.

> It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the rights-if those eyes would be different... if she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too maybe they'd say "why, look at pretty eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes". (Morrison 47)

She constantly prayed for blue eyes. Pecola is constantly reminded about her ugliness. "She is ignored or despised at school by teachers and classmates alike" (45). Also, at Mr. Yacobowski's store, when she goes to get Mary Jane's candy, Mr. Yacobowski acts as if she wasn't there. She is taunted by boys at school. They taunt her saying "Black emo. Black emo. Yadadd-sleepsnekked. Black emo black emoyadadd sleeps nekked. Black emo. Black e mo" (65).

While Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, and Maureen Peal were heading home after the encounter with the boys, Maureen Peal begins to make fun of Pecola, and this vexes Claudia and she attempts punching Maureen but misses and hit Pecola. Maureen Peal, a light skinned girl says "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly emos. I am cute!" (66). Also, Junior, Geraldine's son, lures Pecola into his home and attacks her with a cat. When he kills the cat, he blames it on Pecola causing his mother to yell at her, "Get out, she said, her voice quiet. You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my home" (92).

Through flashback, the narrator reveals that even Pecola's parents had a life full of hardship and tormenting experiences. Pauline, Pecola's mother felt like an outcast as a result of her deformed foot. This is evident when she states that "Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot." (111). In order not to feel the rejection, she begins to emulate white celebrities such as Jean Harcow. Cholly was abandoned at infant by his mother. He was saved and catered for by his aunt, Aunty Jimmy till her death. During Aunty Jimmy's funeral, he engages himself in sex, with a local girl Darlene. They are caught by two white men who force them to continue while they watch. He later goes in search of his father who does not want to have anything to do with him. He meets Pauline and they get married.

The narrator returns to the present. While Pecola was busy washing dishes in the kitchen, Cholly comes home drunk and rapes her on the kitchen floor not sure of what he felt. Pauline returns home and finds Pecola on the floor. She does not believe Pecola's story that Cholly raped her. Cholly rapes her for the second time and flees, leaving her pregnant. She visits Soaphead church; a quack psychic and healer, and requests for blue eyes. He deceives her by making her believe that her desire will be granted. Pecola's baby dies, contrary to

Claudia and Frieda's wish. Pauline and Pecola move to the edge of the town and she is seen picking and talking to herself.

Morrison provides a vivid insight into the psychical process in response to direct racial discrimination, by depicting the character of the smaller girl child Claudia. Not influenced by the white culture yet, little Claudia has not arrived at the turning point in the development of her psyche, which would allow her to love these "blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned dolls" (Morrison 5). What Claudia feels at that time is "unconscious hatred, which ranges from white dolls to all the white girls" (Cheng 195). The black children start with a healthy, direct hatred of white superiority. However, when they get hurt as a result of that hatred (e.g. Claudia gets scolded after taking apart the doll) and receive the reinforcement of the message that whiteness is beautiful and blackness is ugly (e. g. the light-skin black girl Maureen's popularity at school), they begin to look for refuge. "The best hiding place was love. Thus, the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love" (Morrison 16). The adult Claudia confesses that, "I learn much later to worship Shirley Temple, just as I learn to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learn, that the change is adjustment, without improvement. (16)

The adult Claudia diagnoses the black community's worship of white images (as well as cleanliness and denial of the body's desire) as a complicated kind of self-hatred, but they transform hatred into a false love to compensate. Popular culture can sometimes quicken this silent transformation, because the atmosphere it creates, and racist messages are so prevalent that they are difficult to ignore. The standard of beauty that her peers subscribe to is represented by the white child actress, Shirley Temple, who has the desired blue eyes. Claudia revolts against the tyranny of Shirley Temple and white beauty -

> I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels. (Morrison 35)

Therefore, African- Americans are especially vulnerable to the messages conveyed by popular culture that white beauty will inevitably dominate people's life. Things never turn out that simple. If these cultural ideals, which function as tools of racial oppression, are only forced upon the African-Americans, Pecola would never turn to tragedy. It is not to say that external forces, such as racism and sexism, are unimportant, but "the ontological structures and mythological thought systems that blacks develop to define and reinforce their definitions of self and existence" (Samuels & Clenora 78) have a more harmful effect on them.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison points out sharply that African-Americans' worship of white culture, along with their hopelessness, like Pecola's ugliness, is a state of being that is both forced upon and chosen by them. This is why much criticism of Morrison's works

places her in an "integrated" literary tradition but does not identify her with the tradition that has characterized much African-American literature, a tradition that "portrays racism as a definite evil" (Eichelberger 59). To Morrison, only when people choose and accept these white-defined values, do they begin to internalize them and view the world through the eyes of white culture.

Before Pecola's shopping experience to Mr. Yacobowski's grocery store, there are some moments when Pecola temporarily succeeds in breaking the destructive connection between what she sees and how people see her. When she considers that dandelions are pretty (which are viewed as weeds by other people), she implicitly recognizes that beauty can be created by seeing rather than by being seen. By the same logic, she could redefine herself as beautiful even without blue eyes. However, Miner has noted that the "effect of popular American culture's specular construction of beauty is that it bestows presence or absence" (93). One's visibility depends upon one's beauty, which is much worse than mere judgment of beautiful and ugly. Pecola's shopping experience well serves as an outward reflection of the process of internalization of white values. When Pecola walks to the grocery store to buy candy, she encounters "the total absence of human recognition— the glazed separateness" (Morrison 36). Mr. Yacobowski cannot acknowledge Pecola's presence as a subject because he simply cannot look at her, "How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper… see a little black girl?" (Morrison 36).

These are only reinforcements of the influence of the white-beauty standard; Pecola's response to Yacobowski, however, is of crucial importance. After she leaves the grocery store, she briefly experiences a healthy anger, but it gives way to shame. Morrison comments that "anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging" (37-38). But rather than continue this creative act, Pecola acquiesces and "the anger will not hold; it sleeps. The shame wells up again." (Morrison 38) Pecola interprets poor treatment and abuse as her own fault. She believes that the way people observe her is more reliable than what she herself observes. Then she considers dandelions are ugly. She takes solace in eating the candy, but, more importantly, in symbolically digesting the smiling picture of the blue-eyed, blond-haired little girl on the wrapper, "She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (Morrison 38).

Pauline Breedlove, Geraldine, Maureen Peal, and Pecola are black characters who try to conform to an imposed ideal of femininity. They are absorbed and marginalised by the "cultural icons portraying physical beauty: movies, billboards, magazines, books, newspapers, window signs, dolls, and drinking cups" (Gibson 20). Pauline Breedlove, for example, learns about physical beauty from the movies. In Morrison's words,

> along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought.

> Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion (Morrison 95).

Consequently, in trying to conform to the ideal of white femininity, the black women characters despise their blackness which in turn leads to self-hatred. They see themselves through the eyes of white people and their worship of white beauty also has destructive effects on their own community. This is because, as Taylor argues:

> one of the cornerstones of the modern West has been the hierarchical valuation of human types along racial lines. … The most prominent type of racialised ranking represents blackness as a condition to be despised, and most tokens of this type extend this attitude to cover the physical features that are central to the description of black identity. (Taylor 16)

Geraldine, for example, represses her black characteristics which are not 'fitted' to white femininity as she strives "to get rid of the funkiness" (Morrison 64). She also rejects Pecola when she sees her in her house as Pecola seems to embody all the negative aspects of her views of black girls:

> She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel on the shoe. … She had seen this little girl all of her life. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edges of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying 'Shut up!' (Morrison 71-72)

Being well educated and having adopted Western ways of life, Geraldine draws the line between coloured and black. She deliberately teaches her son the differences between coloured and black: "Coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" Morrison 67). Maureen Peal, a light-skinned girl at school, also thinks that she is pretty and Pecola is ugly and Morrison sets up a hierarchy of skin tone marking proximity and distance in relation to idealised physical attributes. As "a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (Morrison 47), Maureen is treated well at school:

> She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilets, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. (Morrison 47-48)

In this process, Pecola chooses and internalizes within herself the values of white superiority values, thus consequently lives a life of self-hatred, and inevitable destruction. Another supportive example is from Pauline' mother, Mrs. Pauline Breedlove. Pecola's own mother reinforces the message the girls have been receiving about the superiority of whites. For Mrs. Pauline Breedlove, movies are the primary vehicle for transmitting white images for public consumption. She absorbs the set of values from the silver screen, then inflicts a severe wound on her husband and children who fail by "the scale of absolute beauty" (Matthews 188). Eventually, Pauline gives up on her own family and takes refuge in the soft beauty surrounding the Fishers' home. When she speaks to Pecola and her friends, her voice is like "rotten pieces of apple, but when she speaks to the white girl, her voice is like honey" (Morrison 78). Her desire to deny her daughter is proved when the white girl asks who the black children are and Mrs. Breedlove avoids answering her. She has renounced her own black family for the family of her white employer. It is no longer the direct oppression of black by white, but oppression of a daughter by her mother who internalizes the white standard of beauty and uses it as a tool to hurt her own daughter. Finally, having been treated very badly by most people surrounding her, Pecola yearns to have blue eyes in the hope that people will love her. Whiteness becomes thus superior and white beauty standard gets legitimization. Finally, Pecola conforms to this social construction- white beauty standard.

Conclusion

For all races and for all individuals, it is essential to fully understand how mass culture touches, influences and shapes our values and beliefs — only after fully understanding that, people can strive to fight and grow to their fullest potential. Because of Morrison's vivid portrait of the subtle yet profound cultural influence, the book won great success, though the plot of The Bluest Eye is not so fresh or different from those of other African-American novels. Through her statement on the damage that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable member of a community- a young girl, Morrison jumps out of the tradition of African-American literature that "portrays racism as a definite evil" (Eichelberger 59). By illustrating the influence of cultural ideals and approaching black people's different psychical responses, this paper shows how a new social construction like white beauty standard forms replacing normalcy and explains its damaging effect on African-Americans as well as on others within their families and the neighborhood.

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