

**T.C.**  
**İSTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**



**OPPRESSION, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN *THE BLUEST EYE***

**M.A. Thesis**

**Sinem Erdağ**

**İSTANBUL- 2012**

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**Supervisor**

**Prof. Dr. Kemalettin Yiğiter**

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**T.C.**  
**İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ**

**Tezli Yüksek Lisans Tez Onay Belgesi**

Enstitümüz İngiliz Dili Ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, İngiliz Dili Ve Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Programı SID09005 numaralı öğrencisi **SİNEM ERDAĞ**'ın “**Oppression Gender And Sexuality In The Bluest Eye**” adlı tez çalışması Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun 17.08.2012 tarih ve 2012/19 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından ..... ile Tezli Yüksek Lisans Projesi olarak ..... edilmiştir.

Öğretim Üyesi Adı Soyadı

İmzası

**Tez Savunma Tarihi** : 04.09.2012

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **OPPRESSION, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN *THE BLUEST EYE***

**Sinem Erdağ**

This study aims to analyze the novel *The Bluest Eye* in terms of oppression, gender and sexuality. I intend to demonstrate how oppression leaves its mark on the African American people especially little girls like Pecola, the protagonist of the novel.

In the novel, gender and sexuality are also main issues. They are handled in such a subtle way that it is impossible for the reader not to be influenced by the tragic story.

The novel illustrates how the impact of society lets the oppressed people down and which inevitable problems it can cause.

**Keywords:** Oppression, society, African American people

## KISA ÖZET

### ***EN MAVİ GÖZ* ROMANINDA BASKI, CİNSİYET VE CİNSELLİK**

Bu çalışma *En Mavi Göz* romanını baskı, cinsiyet ve cinsellik konuları bakımından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Baskının Afrikan-Amerikalılara, özellikle romanın baş kahramanı Pecola gibi küçük kızlara nasıl bir iz bıraktığını kanıtlama hedefindeyim.

Romanda, cinsiyet ve cinsellik de ana konulardandır. Öyle ustaca ele alınmışlardır ki, bu trajik hikayeden okurun etkilenmemesi imkansızdır.

Roman, toplumun etkisinin baskı gören insanları nasıl hüsrana uğrattığını ve hangi kaçınılmaz sorunlara yol açabildiğini anlatır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Baskı, toplum, Afrikan-Amerikanlar

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>KISA ÖZET</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
CHAPTER 1: .....	5
OPPRESSION IN THE BLUEST EYE.....	5
CHAPTER 2: .....	27
GENDER IN THE BLUEST EYE.....	27
CHAPTER 3: .....	40
SEXUALITY IN <i>THE BLUEST EYE</i> .....	40
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>REFERENCES:</b> .....	<b>68</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am very grateful to my thesis supervisor Prof. Dr. Kemalettin Yiğiter for his beneficial guidance, valuable suggestions and encouragement during the writing process of this thesis.

I would thank my parents, Rukiye Erdağ and Burhan Erdağ who have supported me in every way they could from the very first day of my life. I also thank my brother, Sinan Erdağ for being there for me with his kind heart.

I would like to express my gratitude to the lecturers Zeyno Bingör and Nurgül Özcan who really positively affected my motivation by their constructive criticism.



## INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression which had huge impact on world's economy, lasted until World War II. The year when it started varied among nations but in many countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s or early 1940s. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the 20th century.

*The Bluest Eye* is set at the end of the Great Depression, and its effects are felt by the characters in the novel. It is because of the Depression that Cholly does not have a job and that waste is very abhorrent to Mama. On Tuesday October 24th, 1929, the Wall Street stock market crashed, accelerating the most severe economic crisis in U.S. history: the Great Depression. The stock market crash resulted in over a decade of mass unemployment and poverty. By 1933, unemployment nationwide had risen to 26.6%. It was difficult to find a job. Economizing could mean the difference between going hungry and finding food for your family.(Steppenwolf, 12).

In the first chapter of the thesis, I mainly focus on how African Americans are oppressed by dominant society as narrated in the novel. Oppression takes place between black and white people, between black men and black women, between black adults and black children. The one who is more powerful oppresses the weaker one. It is like a show of force but there is no winner in this story.

In *The Bluest Eye*, black characters consent to their status as 'the other' which was imposed upon them by the dominant white community. In turn, they assign this status to more vulnerable individuals like Pecola, the protagonist of the novel.

Morrison uses seeing/not seeing and being seen/not being seen throughout the novel. Pecola is invisible in that her beauty is not perceived, and she desires to disappear or not be perceived. The eye is a natural symbol for perception or seeing (Brooklyn, 3).

The second chapter examines gender disparity in African American and Western societies. *The Bluest Eye* questions the concept of beauty as perceived by its female characters. White society shapes African Americans' point of view about beauty and creates a dislike for their own black roots. They make them look up to the white female beauty: blonde hair and blue eyes. At the end of the novel, we witness how the ideas are imposed and how they can corrupt non-whites.

The third chapter illustrates how the oppressors in the novel use sexuality as a tool to oppress the weak. Humiliated men take their revenge on women or little girls who are more vulnerable. They feel that they have no right to resist their oppressors. Therefore, they direct their anger to what they consider as the weaker sex: the women. They abuse their innocence and create victims like themselves. So, it becomes a cycle of victimization.

In the conclusion, I summarize the ways in which black people are discriminated, abused and oppressed. A lot of characters in the story are in a quest for something. Cholly seeks his father, Pecola searches for love and identity, Claudia yearns for meaning in life, while Soaphead Church looks for shelter. Inability to express love, the distorted child-parent relationship, friendship, white beauty standard, loss of identity, abuse, racism and sexism are the among the most important themes in the novel.

## ABOUT TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio in 1931. Her mother's parents had left Greenville, Alabama, around 1910 after they lost their farm because of debts that they could not repay. Morrison's father's family left Georgia and moved north to escape sharecropping (a system of farming in which a farmer works on someone else's land and pays the owner a share of the crop) and violence against African Americans in the South. Both families settled in Lorain. Morrison grew up during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Her father supported the family by working three jobs for seventeen years.

She displayed an early interest in literature and studied humanities at Howard and Cornell Universities. This was followed by an academic career at Texas Southern University, Howard University and Yale. From 1989 until her retirement in 2006, Morrison held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University. She has also worked as an editor for Random House, a critic, and given numerous public lectures, specializing in African-American literature. She has been awarded a number of literary distinctions, among them the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* in 1988. Toni Morrison is the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Morrison wrote her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. It was banned once in several schools in the USA and challenged but retained several times for its inappropriate sexual content and graphic language. The novel was not commercially successful at that time. The story is about an African American girl who wishes to have blue eyes and fit the image of white beauty. However, the book still speaks to a universal audience.

Morrison's novels are carefully written to produce poetic phrases and strong emotional responses from her readers. Her characters try to understand the truth about the world they live in. The subjects she writes about include good and evil, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, friendship, and death. She is best known for her novels focusing on intimate relationships, especially between men

and women. These stories are set against the backdrop of African American culture. (Encyclopedia of World Biography).

For Morrison, "all good art has been political" and the black artist has a responsibility to the black community. She aims at capturing "the something that defines what makes a book 'black.' And that has nothing to do with whether the people in the books are black or not." She thinks that one characteristic of black writers is "a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends. "Her novels "bear witness" to the experience of the black community and blacks in that community. Her work "suggests who the outlaws were, who survived under what circumstances and why, what was legal in the community as opposed to what was legal outside it" (Brooklyn, 2).

Morrison wants her readers to be involved actively in her novels. The readers constitute meaning with her. They share responses and ideas. So, it becomes a communal experience.

She presents life and her characters in a realistic way with unrealistic elements. Although she at first objected to the label 'magical realism' as she believed it diminished her work, she then accepted that it identifies her supernatural and unrealistic elements very well. "Morrison's most useful tool in finding the truth beyond the merely phenomonic and sensorially perceived reality is the imagination... Although supernatural phenomena are not excluded from Morrison's novels, the stories stem from the characters' ordinary lives and it is only through the writer's narrative artistry that these lives are wrapped in a magical atmosphere, in order to intrigue and surprise us as much as if we were dealing with fantastic elements. Morrison does not set the realistic thesis (the possible) against the fantastic antithesis (the supematural), but goes further, towards the "magic reality" (the strange and untoward), that is, the synthesis beyond that opposition." (Gonzalez, 313).

## CHAPTER 1:

### OPPRESSION IN THE BLUEST EYE

Oppression is a very general term which has always been a major problem concerning minorities in a society. If you are less in number, it is highly possible that you may be faced with some struggles even if you feel equal to others or believe that you have better qualifications than the majority of the citizens living in their own country. No matter how much you try to be accepted, you may fail to be recognized as equal. There is always a way to demoralize you by labeling you as different, hence as inferior.

*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison illustrates one of the most discussed issues: the oppression Afro-Americans faced during the Great Depression; mainly in 1930s. Oppressed because they were black, they lacked the feeling of belonging even to their own hometown. They were being reminded of their color in an insinuating way. So they started to question what made them different and why they were defined as “the other”.

The author makes a perfect choice by choosing a name for the protagonist; Pecola. It evokes us of the word ‘peculiar’ which has several meanings like; strange, queer, odd, uncommon, unusual. These are the labels which strictly stick the poor little black girl named Pecola.

Throughout the novel, being black is associated with ugliness. Pecola’s family accepted that they were ugly, a feeling which is imposed on them by white society. Many of the African Americans of that time believed that they lived in poverty because they were black, and that if they were white, they would be wealthy. In the novel, most of the black characters live in poverty. Most of them knew nothing different than poverty, so they did not long for a change.

The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly... Mrs Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove and Pecola Breedlove wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them... It was as

though some mysterious knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question (Morrison, 28).

At that time, blacks were treated unfairly, and most were unable to resist oppression. This oppression in many cases led to self-hatred. Blacks felt that all of their problems were due to the fact that they had dark skin. The poverty in which they lived and the discrimination they faced caused them to idealize the white race instead of fighting for freedom and equality.

The novel starts with the description of an ideal white family but in the near-parodic style of a school reading primer, where we meet Dick and Jane and their lovely parents who live in a nice, comfortable house with a lovely dog and a cat:

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. See Jane. She has a red dress She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play ( Morrison,1).

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, 1998, 24). As Donald B. Gibson also argues: “The Dick and Jane text implies one of the primary and most insidious ways that the dominant culture exercised 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 herself by internalising the values that dictate the standards of white beauty” (Gibson, 20).

Cholly and his wife have quarrels and fights with each other because of his indifference about his family’s needs and his being drunk most of the time. “ He fought her the way” (Morrison,32). Their fights affected their children and Sammy’s reaction was far more different than Pecola’s. “He cursed for a while, or left the house or threw

himself into the fray... Pecola, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance” (32).

Tired of her parent’s fights, Pecola prays to God to make her disappear. She even goes to extreme by blaming her ugliness for the fights her mother and father had. She becomes obsessed with blue eyes which she believes will make her parents treat each other well. The following quotation illustrates the signs of her extreme obsession with the beauty concept which white hegemony generated.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. 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, 34)

Pecola associates blue eyes with happiness and beauty which she believes white society has. This is also a sign of her blindness to her beauty as she loses her sanity for the sake of blue eyes.

She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces.( Morrison, 33-34 )

Thinking of how ugly she is, she feels more unconfident each passing day. As she feels she is ugly, she feels that she doesn’t deserve anything. She must stay where she is. She has no right to leave her family, start a life in which there is no fighting, insult or ugliness.

As long as she 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 seem 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. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always (Morrison, 34).

Her obsession with the beauty concept gives signals to the readers that she is going mad gradually. She steadily questions her appearance; her skin color, her eyes, her nose, her lips, everything which reminds her of her black roots. The quotation above demonstrate the complexity of Pecola's desire. She does not want blue eyes simply because they conform to white beauty standards, but because she wishes to possess different sights and pictures, as if changing eye color will change reality. Pecola has witnessed a violent fight between her parents, and the only solution she can imagine to end her passive suffering is to witness something different. She believes that if she had blue eyes, their beauty would inspire beautiful and kind treatment on the part of others. Pecola's desire has its own logic even if it is very innocent. To Pecola, the color of one's skin and eyes do influence how one is treated.

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest's blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes... Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time... 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" (Morrison, 34-35).

She seeks beauty in the eyes of white people who decides who is beautiful and who is ugly. She ceaselessly prays and bides her time for the day she will have the bluest eyes. She thinks she has to be beautiful to be loved and if she has blue eyes, respect and affection will take cruelty's place. Her hopeless desire drives her to



madness and the fulfillment of the wish for white beauty is more tragic than the wish impulse itself.

*The Bluest Eye* can also mean the saddest eye as the word blue also has a meaning which is 'sad'. More, there is a play on words: eye is pronounced as 'I': the singular form of the noun. Therefore the title has a double meaning: 'The bluest eye' equals 'I am the saddest'. Thus, it expresses the isolation of its characters.

Pecola enters the small grocery store owned by Mr. Yacobowski. He doesn't even condescend to look into the eyes of Pecola when she asks for Mary Janes candies. He doesn't want to encounter her eyes which evoke a distaste for his white identity.

She pulls off her shoe and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary (Morrison, 36).

Although Pecola is just a little girl, she is able to see the disgust in his eyes:

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition--the glazed separateness. Perhaps because he is, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the of all white people. So, the distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are 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... Pecola holds the money

toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand... Outside, Pecola feels the inexplicable shame ebb (Morrison, 37).

On her way home she again passes the dandelions and thinks, "They are ugly. They are weeds" (37). This is because she has transferred society's dislike of her to the dandelions. She identifies herself with them. They are both regarded as ugly, unnecessary and redundant.

It is clear that people are inclined to see the world only through their own eyes, certainly not through those they dismiss or condemn so easily. Maybe that is true for all of us. We resemble Mr. Yacobowski in the way that we don't see Pecola, we can't see Pecola. There is a vacuum where curiosity, compassion and humanity should lodge. It's not always that way. It doesn't have to be that way. But it too frequently is.

Pecola feels the need not only to be accepted by whites, but also by other outcasts, mainly the prostitutes. "Three whores lived in the apartment above the Breedloves' storefront. China, Poland and Miss Marie. Pecola loved them, visited them, and ran their errands. They, in turn, did not despise her." (Morrison, 38). She does her best to make friends with them and therefore they treat her well. They are not cruel to her, but they don't fuss over her or provide an adequate substitute for the family life Pecola is missing. There is a connection between these three outcasts and Pecola, and a reason why they do not despise her. Between their fallen status and Pecola's belief in her own ugliness, there is common ground.

In the winter, a light-skinned black girl named Maureen Peal starts at the same school where Pecola and Frieda study. She becomes very popular as she has green eyes and looks wealthy. Other students want to be friends with her, even teachers treat her different.

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 girl's toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria--they flocked to the table of her choice (Morrison,48).

Frieda and Pecola are jealous of her and invent nicknames for her while trying to find her flaws:

Frieda and I were bemused, irritated by her. We looked hard for flaws to restore our equilibrium, but had to be content at first with uglying up her name, changing Maureen Peal to Meringue Pie. Later a minor epiphany was ours when we discovered that she had a dog tooth- a charming one to be sure- but a dog tooth nonetheless. And when we found out that she had been born with six fingers on each hand and that there was a little bump where each extra one had been removed, we smiled. They were small triumphs, but we took what we could get-snickering behind her back and calling her Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie. But we had to do it alone, for none of the other girls would cooperate with our hostility. They adored her. (Morrison, 48)

One day, they quarrelled with Maureen when they were on the way to their homes. She called Pecola black and ugly and herself cute. Frieda felt very sorry as Pecola was insulted and demoralized. She started to question being different.

If she was cute- and if anything could be believed, she was--then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encouraged the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our own skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness. Jealousy we understood and thought natural - a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling to us. And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. *The Thing* to fear was *The Thing* that made her beautiful, and not us (Morrison, 57).

Claudia and Frieda are involved in the mindset of this “picture perfect” girl their parents and friends adore. This situation not only lets Maureen rise above them with the

help of snobbish beauty, but also decreases their self-esteem into what Maureen decides it should be.

That "thing" (capital t, italicized) is ideology as it exists in society and passes through the mind. It represents the standards that the whites decide the others obey. The *thing* that can not be questioned and must be accepted without exception. This *thing* is on your side if you are white and rich and it turns its back to you if you are black and poor. Then, it turns into something that is fearful to you as it makes you an ugly outcast.

The color 'black' bears two definitions. First;

It is the visual impression experienced when no visible light reaches the eye. Second, pigments or dyes that absorb light rather than reflect it back to the eye "look black". A black pigment can, however, result from a combination of several pigments that collectively absorb all colors. (Wikipedia).

These are two opposite descriptions which complete each other. 'Black' is the 'lack' of all colors of light, or a combination of multiple colors of pigment.

I relate the color 'black' with people whose color is 'black'. The oppressive white society believes that the blacks lack good traits decent people should have. They are doomed to be inferior before there were born. They do not deserve a high standard of living as whites do. They were born to be servants or slaves. They want blacks to lack self-confidence in order not to fight for their rights and to consent to everything already decided for them.

Despite the egocentric white belief that the blacks lack emotions and ideas, they are no different than whites. They need love, affection, friendship, peace, comfort and so on just as the whites do. They want to have all colors in their life. They need to feel the joy to be valued by others. They need to get away from the feeling of being 'the other'.

Being black is distasteful in white eyes according to the novel. This kind of racism was such a common occurrence that soon the victims began to believe that the insults were true.

Geraldine's family is an example of such hatred, as she shapes her life and her family, to reject their heritage; the color of their skin and the acceptance of inferiority. Geraldine molds her son's views by telling him only to play with white kids; "His mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, 67).

The family has abandoned their race because of the abuse and shame imposed upon them by white people and because of this they have come to believe that white people are superior because of their color, and the shame and hate they feel for themselves is displayed by their imitation of ideal white lifestyle. Although it is well hidden, the misery that Geraldine and her family feel is still present in their lives. "They were everywhere. They slept six in a bed, all their pee mixing together in the night as they wet their beds each in his own candy-and-potato-chip." (92).

Geraldine feels a distaste for the physical appearance of Pecola and girls like her. The quote above shows her opinion of them which becomes worse because she regards them as disgusting stereotypes. However, it is ironic to note that Geraldine's life is the same as the stereotypes she dislikes.

One day, Junior saw Pecola pass by and invited her to his house to show his kittens. Pecola was amazed by the beauty of the house and the furnishings. Junior threw his mother's black cat at her and the cat scratched Pecola's face while trying to get away. While she was crying, the cat rubbed her legs and Pecola began to rub it and admire its blue eyes. Junior grabbed the cat away and started slinging it around by its leg. She got it loose from him but it was thrown against the window and slid down on the radiator unconscious. Just at that moment, Junior's mother came home and Junior blamed the cat's supposed death on Pecola. His mother saw in Pecola all that she had been running from all her life. She called the little girl a "nasty little black bitch" and ordered her out of the house. As Pecola stumbled out the door she saw Jesus standing there with long brown hair and paper flowers around his face.

This chapter breaks the unity of the novel as it introduces other characters who influence Pecola's life. Geraldine is a colorstruck woman: She believes in a hierarchy of value among the people whose skin colors are different. According to her, if yours is

close to white, then you are superior to people with darker skin. She has imitated the middle class life style and followed it strictly. She denies the body's pleasures, keeps her home sacred, imposes a distance between her own group and those people who belong to a lower group. Geraldine has raised her son to be cruel towards weaker people. In *Junior*, Morrison demonstrates the linkage between racist oppression and gender oppression. Not surprisingly, Pecola is on the very bottom of social estimation, lower even than a blue-eyed black cat. The figure of Jesus she sees at the end of the chapter will make his appearance later in the novel as Soaphead Church.

We experience a symbolic geography through a child's perspective when Claudia, Frieda and Pecola walk to the house of family Pauline Breedlove is working for:

We walked down tree-lined streets of soft gray houses leaning like tired ladies... The streets changed; houses looked more sturdy, their paint was newer, porch posts straighter, yards deeper. Then came brick houses set well back from the street, fronted by yards edged in shrubbery clipped into smooth cones and balls of velvet green. The lakefront houses were the loveliest. Garden furniture, ornaments, windows like shiny eyeglasses, and no sign of life" (Morrison, 81).

Morrison takes the time to describe in great detail the scenery, particularly the houses, when Claudia and Frieda were walking from Pecola's rented house to the very different home of the Fisher's. Morrison personifies the houses by calling them "tired ladies." She also uses the landscape to indirectly describe the owners, or in most cases in the black community, the family that is staying there at that time. The homes of black families don't look nearly as beautiful as the homes of the white families that look extravagant. The gray houses in Pecola's neighborhood resembles the tired ladies that work hours during the day to help make money for their families then come home to look after their own children. The girls come from Pecola's neighborhood to the Fisher's where everything becomes straighter, stronger, and prettier, which asserts a clear distinction Morrison places on the differences of the homes.

The backyards of these houses fell away in green slopes down to a strip of sand, and then the blue Lake Erie, lapping all the way to Canada. The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. This sky was always

blue... We reached Lake Shore Park, a city park laid out with rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, picnic tables. It was empty now, but sweetly expectant of clean, white, well-behaved children and parents who would play there above the lake in summer before half-running, half-stumbling down the slope to the welcoming water. Black people were not allowed in the park, and so it filled our dreams (Morrison, 82).

Morrison lays out how, if people are colored (black and white) so, too, are the spaces in which they live. "Blacks live in 'gray' and 'black' places; in these passages the spaces are also hard, worn down, and seemingly inferior. Whites in contrast live in 'green', lush and open spaces, obviously superior. For these children it is not a far leap: inferior gray and black spaces become synonymous with the people that live within" (Norman & Williams, 4).

This passage also expresses the deep longings of children not yet conditioned in the ways of segregation; they desire equality, access to the public park to which blacks are denied entrance. Morrison's child characters are aware of the concrete laws of segregation. *The Bluest Eye* challenges this conventional common sense. The phenomenon of difference in discriminated societies surpasses physical ground and instead covers the entire world within which these children live. To mention again : "The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. This sky was always blue" (81).

Children are exposed to unjust treatments even in their own families. Mrs. Breedlove beats her own child; Pecola, while showing affection to a white girl she has no blood relation. But the stereotype of a mother is expected to be a woman who is warm and consoling to her own children. It is hard to accept how cultures may operate relative to each other within hierarchies of power. Even the black Mammy acts like the oppressive whites and segregates her own little black child:

It may have been nervousness, awkwardness, but the pan tilted under Pecola's fingers and fell to the floor, splattering blackish blueberries everywhere. Most of the juice splashed on Pecola's legs, and the burn must have been painful, for she cried out and began hopping about just as Mrs. Breedlove entered with a tightly packed laundry bag. In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back

of her hand knocked her to the floor... Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication...“Crazy fool... my floor, mess... look what you... work... get out... now that... crazy... my floor, my floor.” Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread.” The little girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her. “Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don’t cry no more. Polly will change it (Morrison, 84).

This example of hierarchy formed through culture and power within Western societies is more than just a horrible story; it is unfortunate and terrifying reality.

Cholly and Pauline Breedlove arrive in Lorain, Ohio from the rural South. Pauline had no idea that this moving would entirely change her marriage and her life. She starts to feel lonely as if she had no one to talk to. Fear made Pauline someone else. Before the understanding of “human hatred” consumed her, she was someone filled with colorful dreams and hopes about the future. She believed that somewhere around the world a person was coming to save her and with him she would be whole in the world, accepted, loved and loving in return.

I don't know what all happened. Everything changed. It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful, but they didn't come around too much... Up north they was everywhere- next door, downstairs, all over the streets - and colored folks few and far between. Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. This was the lonest time of my life (Morrison, 91).

As expressed in this passage, she feels alienated from society. She is surprised to see colored people act classy and snobbish. Feeling this way, Pauline desperately tries to be someone else to belong, only to find that because of who she is can neither change nor be accepted. She turns into a person who can't love and is afraid to show affection. She gives up her dreams.



Pauline felt uncomfortable with the few black women she met. They were amused by her because she did not straighten her hair... Their goading glances and private snickers at her way of talking (saying "chil'ren") and dressing developed in her a desire for new clothes (Morrison, 92).

Pauline's jealousy is aroused by the other black women judging her. Like her daughter, Pauline believes that if she alters her appearance people will treat her differently.

*The Bluest Eye*, taken as a whole, serves simultaneously as an affirmation of the natural and cultural beauty of Americans who are considered black, and an indictment of the racist society that denies this beauty and internalizes the denial within many blacks. While there are no developed white characters within the novel, white people and whiteness itself make frequent cameos to demonstrate the roots of self-loathing found in many characters. While whiteness undoubtedly functions as a terror throughout the novel, Morrison's depiction of whiteness is unique in how it functions deterministically to create self-loathing black characters. Morrison outlines both the process and resistance to it from the perspective of a black female (Lazar, 2).

According to the novel, being an outcast both by white society and their own black people can lead to psychological downfall of a person. Cholly fits this situation perfectly. His father left him after he was born. With this impression and the death of his only relative who cares for him, Cholly feels the need to find his father to search for himself. In order to understand who he is, he needs to look into his past. He searches for a long time for his father and finally finds him. However, this is a very painful and disappointing experience. He longs for his father for years and the longing vanishes sadly. As Cholly tries to explain his identity to his father, he becomes very aggressive and his face changes as he begins to understand.

His father says: "something wrong with your head? Who told you to come after me?" At this point, Cholly feels helpless, confused, and scared. He shouts at Cholly, "Tell that bitch she got her money. Now, get the fuck outta my face!" (Morrison, 123).

This extremely embarrassing encounter with his father scars him for life. His only image of a father figure is one who brings pain. Thus, Cholly feels free of responsibility and boundaries set on him by society. He becomes free;

Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. Free to take a job, free to leave it. He could go to jail and not feel imprisoned, for he had already seen the furtiveness in the eyes of his jailer, free to say, "No, suh," and smile, for he had already killed three white men. Free to take a woman's insults, for his body had already conquered hers. Free even to knock her in the head, for he had already cradled that head in his arms. Free to be gentle when she was sick, or mop her floor, for she knew what and where his maleness was. He was free to drink himself into a silly helplessness, for he had already been a gandy dancer, done thirty days on a chain gang, and picked a woman's bullet out of the calf of his leg. He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die, the how and the when of which held no interest for him. In those days, Cholly was truly free. Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him (Morrison,125).

Cholly met Pauline Williams in this "godlike" state of freedom. He fell in love with her. Soon, they had two children, Sammy and Pecola. Cholly never had any type of parental relationship with his parents. He had no concept of how to be a parent to his own children. He was not prepared for the responsibility of married life, which included having children. He only reacted to his children based on whatever he felt at the moment.

After having learnt that her daughter, Pecola was raped by her father, Pauline is not overwhelmed with grief. Pecola is, once again assaulted. Adults are only interested in the shameful of the event rather than the awful condition of Pecola. They talk about how Cholly is the father of the baby, why she did not put up a fight and so on. This is an evidence of how ignorant, thoughtless and even hostile the community

around Pecola is, particularly when it comes to a subject like sexual exploitation. Her own father and mother abuse her, other adults deny and make her invisible and other children mock her by continuously picking on her. “Many black women who are raped suffer a dual victimization as they are abused first by their rapist and then victimized again by their family members, community residents and social institutions” ( Collins, Patricia Hill, 147). Ironically, instead of Cholly, Pecola was criticized very harshly by women in the community. Their neighbors claimed that she was responsible for this rape. They discuss Cholly’s raping Pecola among themselves:

“Well, they ought to take her out of school.”

“Ought to. She carry some of the blame.”

“Oh, come on. She ain’t but twelve or so.”

“Yeah. But you never know. How come she didn’t fight him?”

“Maybe she did.”

“Yeah? You never know.”

“Well, it probably won’t live. They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself.”

“She be lucky if it don’t live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking.”

“Can’t help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground.”

“Well, I wouldn’t worry none. It be a miracle if it live.” ( Morrison, 149)

Pecola's pregnancy reveals the cruelty and irresponsibility of the black community. The community feels no compassion for Pecola and offers her no help. Pecola is forced to leave school because of her pregnancy and is isolated from other children; moreover, she is the subject of titillating gossip and judgmentalness by adults. Claudia and Frieda listen for any adult to express compassion or sorrow for Pecola.

They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils (149).

The destructive side of the community is expressed in its response to Pecola; it continues to treat Pecola as the outsider and the Other, as it applies a standard of beauty that condemns her to irredeemable ugliness. It is not the white community that has directly destroyed Pecola, but the black community and her parents. They should have insulated her from the white community's values and have protected her. Claudia has not yet internalized the white standard of beauty. She wants Pecola's black baby to be loved and to be appreciated for its beauty. She imagines the black baby clearly, in images which capture its beautiful blackness and which contrasts with the artificial, unattractive white-baby-doll standard of beauty.

It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live - just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals" (Morrison,149).

The white baby dolls of course represent not only the white standard of beauty but also the white domination of the black community. The values and spirit of the black community have been corrupted by the dominant white society. Nevertheless black children still form a cohesive community which is a source of strength and support between each other.

In the second-to-last chapter of the novel, there is a quotation from Claudia which describes the philosophy of Claudia and Frieda;

Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us - not then. Our only handicap was our size; people gave us orders because they were bigger and stronger. So it was with confidence, strengthened by pity and pride, that we decided to change the course of events and alter a human life (Morrison, 150).

They stood against whatever they perceive threatens them, whether it was a white doll, boys making fun of Pecola, Henry's molestation of Frieda, or the community's rejection of Pecola. Their active revolt contrasts sharply with Pecola's passive presence. They are the examples of powerful responses to oppression. Claudia implies that this willingness for resistance disappears with adulthood. Frieda and Claudia are protected by their parents, and in part because they do not suffer from what Pecola does:

The narrator enters Pecola's mind and reports Pecola's mental conversation. Pecola is no longer capable of reporting her own life or of connecting to the world outside herself. Claudia's description of Pecola's behavior in the junkyard indicates that Pecola does not speak aloud, for only her gestures are reported, "walking up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly (163).

Pecola is pushed into madness by the rejections of her mother (who beats her for reporting Cholly's rape), of her brother (who runs away), and of the community and by Soaphead's acceptance of her wish for blue eyes. Her imaginary friend expresses Pecola's subconscious desire for acceptance, love, and friendship. Her friend reassures Pecola that she does indeed have blue eyes and that they are bluer than other girls'. However, because the imaginary friend expresses the subconscious or hidden, it also expresses Pecola's unacknowledged doubts and fears. Thus at times it comes close to hostility and threatens to reveal unacceptable truths. Much to Pecola's distress, it refers to the second time Cholly raped her. It tells Pecola, "You didn't need me before" (154), a truth so threatening and painful to Pecola and so close to the psychological reality that it immediately adds, "I mean... you were so unhappy before. I guess you didn't notice me before" (154). (Note: Pecola's friend is female, but I refer to the friend as "it" rather than "she," to avoid any confusion over whether I mean the imaginary friend or Pecola).

Pecola knows she does not have blue eyes but she needs to have them to get attention and support. After she believes she has got blue eyes, she still feels something is missing. Her eyes do not produce general acceptance of her mother's love. She still ignores Pecola and gives her strange looks. Therefore, it occurs to her that her blue eyes

are somehow insufficient or defective. If she has the bluest eyes of all, then her eyes will be perfect and she will be considered beautiful without any doubt.

The final section of the novel is narrated by Claudia as an adult; she judges the past and states the significance of these events. She is generous in placing responsibility for Pecola's destruction on the black community. She sees Pecola walking between “the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world--which is what she herself was” (162). These images of waste and beauty echo the description of Cholly's abandonment in a tire rim on a soft Georgia night. Morrison sees life whole and complex, with beauty and ugliness completely mixed. But in the case of Pecola, the beauty is naturally hers, her innocence and vulnerability and potential; her waste and ugliness are thrown onto her by the black community and her mother, thereby displacing her beauty.

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us - all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength (Morrison, 163).

This quotation, from the last chapter of the novel, summarizes Claudia's impressions of Pecola's madness. The society throws away their waste on Pecola as she is chosen as a scapegoat for her father raping her. But Claudia regards Pecola as an example of beauty despite of all the judgements. Pecola is beautiful because she is a human being. But the society is not able to see this beauty because whiteness is the first thing which comes to their minds when they define beauty. Actually, Pecola gives them beauty because her ugliness makes them feel beautiful. It is tragic as this is not the real beauty which is supposed to be related to the personality.

Blacks in the community use Pecola to feel better about themselves. By assigning to her their negative feelings about themselves, they are able to feel good about themselves or at least better about themselves. It is Pecola who is ugly, not they; it is Pecola who is worthless, not they. Pecola, who developed passivity as a strategy for survival in her family and whose mother condemned her to ugliness from birth, accepts the view which they have of her. She sees her ugliness in the eyes of others, hears it in their voices, and experiences it in their behavior. So she is the perfect victim and the perfect garbage dump for the self-hatred of the community. In other words, she is sacrificed for the psychological protection and evasions of the community. Claudia includes herself in her assessment of the community's behavior and motives, as indicated by her references to 'we' and 'our.' She and Frieda do finally reject Pecola by avoiding her (Brooklyn,17).

Claudia goes on to condemn the community and herself for their abuse of Pecola, "...we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life" (205). As suggested in the passage about Claudia's movement from hating white baby dolls and little white girls to loving Shirley Temple(s), Claudia has lost her innocence.

Claudia makes a final statement about love and concludes the theme of love. Claudia acknowledges that The Maginot Line and Cholly loved Pecola. The Maginot Line loved her because Pecola is an outcast like herself. Cholly loved her but his love was abnormal:

Unfortunately for Pecola, Cholly's love is of a mixed nature. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death (206).

Love, in itself, is not necessarily enough; it is not a universal remedy. It is the false ideal of love, which Morrison calls "romantic love," which gives love the power to

transform and make perfect both the beloved and life: the forever-after love of fairy tales, movies, and popular fiction. Moreover, the quality and consequences of love are determined by the character of the lover. Claudia continues with a statement which I regard as a profound truth:

Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye (206).

She is using the term "free" in the sense of no attachments, as in Cholly's having nothing left to lose. The free man in this sense exists only for himself, for the fulfillment of his own needs and impulses; he is unaware of the other person and unconcerned with the effect of his actions on her or him. Because of his disconnection, the free man cannot give or contribute to the beloved. Claudia uses the image of the eye in the last sentence of this quotation; the beloved does not see herself reflected back by the free man and is depersonalized.

The last paragraph returns to the failed marigolds of the first paragraph Claudia says:

And now when I see her searching the garbage – for what? The thing we assassinated? I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town (Morrison,163).

Initially, the two sisters blamed themselves for the failure of the marigolds, the death of Pecola's baby, and her descent into madness because of their innocence and belief in themselves and their power to affect events. But after a long time, Claudia becomes an adult, thus no longer naive and aware of her own confusion and that of the community. She now believes the failure was the fault of the earth, the land, of her town. Clearly the failure of marigolds is symbolic, not literal. What destroys Pecola is the grown ups who know Pecola, the black community which directs its self-hatred to her, and the racist white society which holds destructive values and imposes them on the



black community. The white society is not only to blame for the destruction of the black community and the destructiveness of the black community; the black society is also responsible, for it has accepted or internalized white values and standards and not appreciated or protected all of its children. White society is responsible for its racist attitudes and behavior, which damage the black community, as well as individual blacks while corrupting their values.

The marigold seeds which fail are also an example of Morrison's use of magic. There is the suggestion that nature itself or perhaps even life is hostile to certain black children.

I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say that victim had no right to live (164).

On her way to the small grocery store on Garden Avenue, Pecola sees dandelions. Though she finds them pretty, she wonders why people call them weeds. She remembers grown-ups talking to each other “ Miss Dunion keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion anywhere.” “They make dandelion soup. Dandelion wine. They use dandelions to feed on them. Nobody loves the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so many, strong, and soon.” (Morrison, 35). Dandelions are used as a metaphor here. It reminds us of the black people who are not welcomed by the white people living in the same neighborhood. This is the main reason why they don't like blacks. Because blacks are so many, strong, and soon. So they can be threatening for the whites. “Pecola owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads, last fall, she had blown away; whose yellow heads, this fall, she peered into. And owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her” (Morrison, 36). No matter how different a person or a thing is from the others, it is still an important part of this world. It is what completes the incomplete. Diversity makes the world more beautiful, a better place to live in. So, one should try to see the beauty while looking at something or somebody considered ugly and strange. By this way, absolute happiness and peace can be achieved.

The novel ends on a sorrowful note. The concluding sentences express a profound sense of loss and despair, "It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late" (164). Yet even in this hopelessness, Morrison interrupts the mixture of beauty and ugliness and of life and death with the image of "the garbage and the sunflowers."

It may be too late for Pecola and Claudia's community, but the reader is left wondering, did things have to turn out this way? Was the community's mistreatment of Pecola inevitable? These are the rhetoric questions one should dare to ask but should not expect reasonable answers.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **GENDER IN THE BLUEST EYE**

The white world has victimized black women in terms of sexism, racism and classism. The issues of race, gender and class which they have had to face push them to the furthest limit of desperation. These three major problems indicate the traumatic conditions under which they live in white America. The psychological and societal oppression affected blacks in general and Afro-American women in particular.

For centuries, the black community had to put up with racism and exploitation regardless of their sex. However, black women were more oppressed mentally and physically. Because their burden was greater. A black woman's life was full of torture as they were cast towards the outskirts of society because of their gender. Like the ideal white women, they were expected to be beautiful in an ornamental way, she had to be married and chaste. She was not supposed to work for a living. The Black woman was an anti-thesis of this image. She was not beautiful nor ornamental according to the aesthetics of the country. Moreover, most of black women had to work to support their family.

Sexism frightens black women both physically and mentally. As a gender bias, it subordinates women to men through patriarchal thinking. The egocentric patriarchal ideologies assign women secondary roles and deal with gender differences. While white women have also been victims of these prejudices, the black women's position has always been more vulnerable. They had to tolerate the treatments of white and black men and fight for survival both inside and outside the home. While whites assaulted and raped them, black men looked upon them as immoral beings. Black men developed a dislike towards the women of their community. They regarded them as corrupt characters which would prefer extramarital adventures to marital permanence. Therefore, the black women did not have a protection from the men of their own community.

The blacks have suffered due to their status in society, as a poor, marginal group. The black women, like the black men were also working women. The black women had to work on plantation farms as laborers and also as “mammys” or maids in the kitchens of the white households. They were generally looked upon as menials (Bharati & Joshi, 38).

It is significant to mention that race, class and gender have been interrelated in the history of black women. They, in fact, originated from the same set of circumstances and are motivated by economic, social and psychological forces. Gloria Wade Gyles explains this through an imagery of circles:

There are three major circles of reality in American Society, which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people, most of the men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a small circle, a narrow space, in which there are the black people, regardless of sex, experience, uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, illation and vulnerability. These are the distinguishing marks of black womanhood in White America. (1984: 3 - 4)

The tragic conditions of blacks in racist America are portrayed critically by Morrison in the *The Bluest Eye*. It illustrates how dominant groups maintain their ideologies and marginal groups adopt them. As a result, these influence the identity of the black women. Attacked by the image of white beauty, Morrison’s characters hate themselves and their only aim in life is to be beautiful like whites. They try to forget their heritage, and eventually like Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist, who longs for blue eyes, they drift to madness.

According to K. Sumana, Morrison believes that “the concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the most pernicious and destructive” (1998:7). *The Bluest Eye* attacks the relationship between the psychological oppression of black women and white standards of female beauty. Many characters adopt the influential white standards of beauty which lead to destruction and cruelty at the end.

Morrison shows us what is considered ugly and what is considered beautiful and then challenges whether we have our definitions straight. She starts out one chapter telling us about "they" and how even the words "they" speak are beautiful. She says that non-whites should stick to their roots firmly.

They come from Mobile. Aiken. From Newport News. From Marietta. From Meridian. And the sounds of these places in their mouths make you think of love. When you ask them where they are from, they tilt their heads and say 'Mobile' and you think you've been kissed. They say "Aiken" and you see a white butterfly glance off a fence with a torn wing... You don't know what these towns are like, but you love what happens to the air when they open their lips and let the names ease out (Morrison, 63).

She goes on to describe these women, these brown girls who are calm, quiet, sweet, and plain. They do all the things that the so-called 'good' girls do. Morrison tell us they work hard at getting rid of funkiness: "The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions. Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies" (63).

It is demonstrated that they found beauty through a fear of feeling and a internalized shallowness by themselves.

They go to land-grant colleges and normal schools. They learn to "do the white man's work with refinement." They study home economics, teacher education, music and especially they learn how to behave, how to get rid of funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions (Morison, 64).

Most of all they tried to rid themselves of the funkiness of being black. Because they saw how white people treated blacks, they could not acknowledge the fact that they, themselves were black, and they tried to become something else. The easiest way for them to do this was to insult black people, and push them lower, so they themselves could rise to the top. They were shut out by the whites because they did not belong, but shut themselves off from their own black race, by trying to be white.

The women living nearby Aunt Jimmy visited her to see whether she got better. They all sat and talked over Aunt Jimmy's condition and then their own history of ailments and cures. Once these women had been young.

Then they had grown. Edging into life from the back door. Becoming. Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "do this." White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other. But they took all of that and re-created it in their own image. They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other (Morrison, 108).

As they grew old, they gained freedom. They got rid of the humiliation they suffer from their husbands and white people in their old age. They could walk out in the fields and roads and not be bothered.

Then they were old. Their bodies honed, their odor sour... They had given over the lives of their own children and tendered their grandchildren. With relief they wrapped their heads in rags, and their breasts in flannel; eased their feet into felt. They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror. They alone could walk the roads of Mississippi, the lanes of Georgia, the fields of Alabama unmolested. They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death, disinterested enough to accept the idea of pain while ignoring the presence of pain. They were, in fact and at last, free. And the lives of these old black women were synthesized in their eyes -- a puree of tragedy and humor, wickedness and serenity, truth and fantasy (Morrison, 108).

The self image of the African American female is destroyed by internal racism. It ruins the most vulnerable victim: 'The African female child.' Morrison demonstrates how racial violence can lead to the destruction of female children and the

dehumanization of an entire race. Self-hatred of the community seeks a social outcast to look down upon. They feel the need to improve their threatened sense of worth. The novel shows how Pecola becomes miserable in a community that is afflicted by self-hatred.

The experiences of black children growing up amid the standards of white beauty are conveyed through a number of images. The tangible Shirley Temple mug has blue eyes, so does the little Fisher girl. The Shirley Temple mug and the Mary Lane Candies allow Pecola to carry the image through her very being. The dolls presented to black girls like Claudia are to the parents, their own unfulfilled longings of childhood and Mrs. Macteer cannot understand Claudia's destroying them (Bharati,42).

Claudia tears them apart to find why they are lovely and the world treasures them. Eventually, she gives in and starts to like them like others.

Pecola suffers not only because she is poor and black, but also because she is female. Gender therefore becomes an important issue in the novel. Pecola's destruction is almost like slaughter which brutally harms her sanity. Pecola undergoes the same marginalization any other woman would experience under patriarchal society.

All the black women in *The Bluest Eye* are exposed to racism, alienation, dependency and repression. They try to find fulfillment and meaning in their life. They are marginal groups on account of their gender and race. Claudia expresses the truth about the women in their community: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major fonts of the garment" (Morrison,11). She fears being put "outdoors", the way Cholly has put the women in his life outdoors.

Pecola can not find any fulfillment in life unlike other women in the novel; Mrs. Macteer looks after her family and tries to make ends meet, Geraldine and Maureen Peal try assume fake identities, Pauline tries to fulfill the role of the ideal mammy. Only the prostitutes, China, Poland and Maginot Line who are marginal groups as well, give Pecola maternal care. Of course, this does not meet what she needs as a child. Therefore, her only escape is descent into madness.

This is why Morrison explains she focused on the most delicate member of society: ‘a child’ and the most vulnerable member, ‘a female.’ Valerie Smith in her book on Toni Morrison points out, “The meaning of blackness in this country shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect inculcatable of race” (Smith, 47).

Being black and hence considered ugly, Pecola does not meet the standards of society. She therefore, is discarded from society although she has gained consciousness of self. Being a poor black female child, she has all the features of being pushed to the margins.

The ‘informal education’ that black children receive outside the classroom is cause for additional alarm. Black children cannot escape the pervasive presence of the dominant society’s cultural icons of female beauty, e.g., Shirley Temple, Jean Harlow, Ginger Rogers, Greta Garbo, Hedy Lamarr, and Betty Grable. The image of white skin and blue eyes was everywhere – manifest[ing] itself in movies, billboards, children’s drinking cups, Mary Jane candies [...]. This constant, involuntary exposure to white cultural “ideals” is not only detrimental to the psychological development of black children, particularly black girls, but also to the psychological well being of black women (Byerman, 100-101).

And consequently, Morrison reserves some of her strongest criticism for “the cultural authority of film” (Fick, 58), wherein film becomes the transmitter of Anglo-Saxon standards of beauty. Black women such as Pauline Breedlove went to the movies and, in the process, lost the ability to see their own beauty. Pauline became obsessed with modeling her physical appearance on the white skinned, blonde haired Jean Harlow. Thus, literary critic Carolyn Denard comments that “[...] the self-esteem of both Pauline and Pecola Breedlove is summarily destroyed by their and the black community’s acceptance of the standards of feminine beauty glamorized by the majority white culture. They believe that the closer a woman is to Anglo-Saxon standards of beauty the more desirable she becomes” (Denard, 172).

Morrison, concerned with the measurement of worth by physical criteria, wrote in 1974 that “the concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most



pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world, and we should have nothing to do with it” (Samuels & Weems, 1).

In her words, Pauline explains her feelings about people’s treatment of black women. The passage below conveys the truth about their suppressed personality. Black women can not express their pain and sufferings even when giving birth. She criticizes that other people should not be that insensitive towards their feelings. She, as a black woman, can be hurt like a white woman. She is also aware of white people’s opinion about black people who they regard as ugly and detestable. Pauline can not escape from this insult. She also calls her own daughter ugly after giving birth.

When he got to me he said now these here women you don’t have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. [ . . . ] I had to let them people know having a baby was more than a bowel movement. I hurt just like them white women. Just ‘cause I wasn’t hooping and hollering before didn’t mean I wasn’t feeling pain. What’d they think? That just ‘cause I knowed how to have a baby with no fuss that my behind wasn’t pulling and aching like theirs? Besides, that doctor don’t know what talking about. He must never seed no mare foal. Who say they don’t have no pain? Just ‘cause she don’t cry? ‘Cause she can’t say it, they think it ain’t there? If they looks in her eyes and see them eyeballs lolling back, see the sorrowfullook, they’d know. [ . . . ] Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly (Morrison, 97-98).

Hollywood movies serve as a deceptive tool which intend to advertise a false model of beauty and whiteness. In *The Bluest Eye*, cinema is used as a machine that targets the minds and the psyches of her female characters. Other than implying the first singular noun: ‘I’, the word ‘eye’ in the title also acts as the eye of the camera. It sees and witnesses the victimization of the females by the films they watch. Thus, they can not get away with the ideology expressed in these films.

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I'd go early, before the show started. They'd cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don't know. I 'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time. I thought I'd see it through to the end again, and I got up to get me some candy. I was sitting back in my seat, and I taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could of cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly (Morrison, 95-96).

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola, Geraldine and Maureen Peal are the main characters in the novel who try to adapt to an imposed ideal of femininity. The cultural icons portraying physical beauty both marginalize and absorb them. These are mainly films, books, magazines, newspapers, billboards, dolls, drinking cups with pictures and so on.

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, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen. . .It was really a simple pleasure, but she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate (Morrison, 95).

It is ironic that cinema which leads the destruction of Pauline's and Pecola's life seems the only place where Pauline feels happy as she learns white society's values. The romantic love affairs and the luxurious life in the films continue to make her dissatisfied and thus, unhappy at her home.

The movies made her give importance to the material possessions of the Fishers' (the family she has been working for), comparing it to her own pitiful habitation. She makes a decision to be an ideal servant which she sees as her primary duty. "Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of her people, fear of life" (100). Because of her mother, Pecola inherited features that shaped her personality. As a result, we get a representation of distortion in Pecola throughout the story.

Pauline's internalization of inferiority takes a less overt path. Pauline is destroyed by Cholly's violence, as well as by "her education in the movies" which gave her a "scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (95). This leads Pauline to seek out and thrive in the role of domestic worker for white families, where she takes on the stereotypical "mammy" role. Seeking the beauty she imagines through film, she embraces domestic work and becomes "the ideal servant" (99). This comes at the price of the denial of her own identity. While to her employers she is "Polly," her children know her only as Mrs. Breedlove. When Cholly and Pauline's daughter, Pecola, visits Pauline at the house of her employer one day, Pauline denies to the white child any connection to her own daughter. Pauline embraces an idealized image of whiteness as beauty, while conversely seeing herself and family as ugly.

The effect of the white culture is shown in many references to the films. The film adaptation of the novel *Imitation of Life* is mentioned when Maureen Peal and Pecola introduce themselves to each other. Maureen says that Pecola is the name of the girl in the movie. She adds: "this mulatto girl hates her mother cause she is black and ugly" (Morrison,52).

According to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis:

In each film's representation of the transgressive woman-the black daughter who looks white, and who, because of the contradiction between being and seeming which defines her, can fit comfortably into neither culture-there is a correspondence between feminine sexuality and alterity which results in a sexualization of the radical 'otherness' of the black woman (44).

The black women characters look down on their own blackness while trying to fit into the ideal of white femininity. The result is self-hatred. They cease to see their real beauty and start to look through the eyes of the whites and adore the white beauty which will have devastating influences on their community.

Danille Taylor Guthrie argues:

Geraldine, for example, represses her black characteristics which are not fitted to white femininity as she strives to get rid of the funkiness. 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 (64).

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 Shet up! (Morrison,71).

In terms of subjected and gendered body, the femininity of black women resembles that of white women in spite of radical distinctions. For instance, Pecola regards herself as an ugly object which has a worthless body. The ideal body of femininity is already decided by the male dominance. An ideal woman's face must be made up like her body. This brings the argument that woman body is regarded as deficient.

Pecola can not come close to the ideal of white beauty as she does not have the blue eyes which are among the symbols of white beauty. Although white women might lack something related to the gendered body, they are not racialized as the black women are, thanks to their privilege of being white.

Grewal argues that; If Luce Irigaray's feminine subject (a universal feminine subject) is defined as lack, as absence, then the black woman is doubly lacking, for she must simulate or feign her femininity as she dissimulates or conceals her blackness (Grewal, 26).

Accordingly, *The Bluest Eye* can be read as a critical analysis of liberal white feminism which ignores the experience of black women. As Madhu Dubey discusses:

The presence that defines black feminine characters in the novel as deficient is represented not by the black man but the white woman. Each expression of black feminine desire, whether Pecola's longing for blue eyes, Frieda's love of Shirley Temple, Claudia's hatred of white dolls, Maureen's adoration of Betty Grable, or Pauline's of Jean Harlow, takes the white woman as its object (Dubey, 39-40).

However, there are some exceptions among black female characters who look up to Western standards of beauty. Claudia stands as the best example. She is aware of the dangerous consequences of adopting the white beauty standards. At the beginning of the novel, she criticizes the admiration of Shirley Temple and the white dolls. She can not understand why people worship those kinds of imposed idols. Then, she tries to comprehend that she actually does not feel hatred for light-skinned Maureen but hates the thing that makes Maureen beautiful; "...all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not worthy of such intense hatred. "The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us" (Morrison, 58). She clearly implies that she fears the ideology of whiteness that makes Maureen look beautiful.

As children, Claudia and her sister Frieda are happy with their difference, their blackness: "We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness." (Morrison,57). This may suggest that Claudia resists the pressure to conform to a white vision of beauty. However, she wonders why people admire little white girls;

Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? (Morrison, 57).

The vulnerability of women is expressed in the names of the three prostitutes: China, Poland and Marie, who is known as Maginot Line. Their names bring World War II back to the reader's consciousness: "Poland" and "China" are both countries which, in 1939, were occupied or being invaded by fascist armies.

Both are sites of terrible genocide as both the Japanese and the Germans made millions the victims of ethnic cleansing campaigns. Marie's name also recalls the war; "Marie" is a French name, and France was invaded in the spring of 1940. In the next section, we learn that Marie is also known as the Maginot Line, the name of the powerful defensive line built by France to stop a German invasion. The Line was a complete failure. By giving the prostitutes names that refer to invaded countries and Axis victories, Morrison maintains World War II (and the Nazi regime and its Aryan idea of beauty) as a distant background (Borey, 20).

The reason why Morrison gives these names to the prostitutes are likely to relate their failures to the prostitutes. Their names suit them as they were attacked and invaded as well as these prostitutes who are defeated both physically and psychologically. They are outcasts and survivors, and they illustrate the inconsistent positioning of women. Black women are influential in holding families together, in enduring the worst part of prejudice and in running both their own households and the households of white employers, but they are in many ways society's most vulnerable members.

Post-renaissance scientific discourses have expressed dominant social theories of the gendered body. Male mentality defends that women should be mastered and conquered by men. As Nancy Hartsock explains, "the female mind either does not exist (Do women have souls?) or works in such incomprehensible ways as to be unintelligible

(the 'enigma of woman')" (298). Dominant ideology addresses the female body as a mystery and center of sexuality.

In *Female Body in Western Culture*, Susan Rubin Suleiman argues, it inspires “fear and loathing”; it is “beautiful but unclean, alluring but dangerous, woman's body [... ] has appeared mysterious, duplicitous—a source of pleasure and nurturance, but also of destruction and evil” (Rubin, 1). Because of these labels, women have become a part of this confusion about their bodies. Therefore, a gap between them and their bodies is created. Issues about females are destined to remain as taboos even in literature as long as something is done to demolish this chaotic and awkward situation.

## CHAPTER 3:

### SEXUALITY IN *THE BLUEST EYE*

African American women were sexually abused in the United States during slavery. Sexual molestation and abuse are still a big problem. By focusing on this matter, Toni Morrison attempts to uncover what is still a taboo in the African American society.

The first paragraph of the novel *The Bluest Eye* gives us a clue that something tragic has happened. When the narrator lets us know Pecola who is just a child and has become pregnant by her father, she makes it clear that the theme of the story is about sexual abuse. The narrator, Claudia remembers how she, along with her sister, tried to help Pecola by planting seeds of marigolds in the ground which was a sacrificial act according to them:

We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear now is that all of that hope, fear, lust, love and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too. There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how (Morrison, 5-6).

The opening passage explains how innocence is lost because of a father's lust and a ruined childhood as a result of it. Morrison explains why she shared the secret of Pecola so soon: "The intimacy I was aiming for, the intimacy between the reader and the page, could start up immediately because the secret is being shared" (Morrison: Afterword, 169).

Morrison involves the reader in the story from the beginning. The narrator wants to ask why this awful incident happened, but realizes that to ask why is too painful and therefore starts to describe how things happened. Morrison uses the seeds that the girls are planting as a metaphor for their hope and faith, which is also an allusion to the



moral story of the seeds from the Bible; when the seeds do not grow it is because of an unyielding earth or a hostile environment. Suranyi points to the metaphorical parallel between the seed of the marigolds and the seeds of Pecola's father: "The metaphor extends to Pecola herself, who was born in a hostile world, in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Suranyi, 14). When Pecola's baby dies, the novel suggests that the social environment in which the girls live is barren, unwelcoming and destructive.

Pecola's obsession with Mary Jane is shown at this quotation;

Each pale yellow wrapper had a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. 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... Three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane. Lovely Mary Jane for whom the candy is named (Morrison, 38).

This paragraph describes the life of Mary Jane which Pecola looks up to. As a result of her white beauty, her name is given to a candy brand. Pecola believes Mary Jane lives in a 'world of clean comfort.' Pecola loves Mary Jane as she represents whiteness which is the only love she has found in her life. She wants to be good, innocent and pure like her. For this reason, she yearns for blue eyes which will give her the comfortable life Mary Jane has. While reading this quotation about Mary Jane, a reader can understand what Pecola is feeling throughout the entire novel. Her parents have always given her little attention and they always made her feel ugly and inadequate. She feels that if she had Mary Jane's blue eyes, she would be beautiful and her parents would love her.

The second paragraph says, "Three pennies bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane." In a symbolic sense, Pecola is expressing a misconceptual ecstasy with the Mary Jane candy. Therefore it is interesting that Mary Jane is a slang term for marijuana, an illegal drug which produces a feeling of pleasant relaxation. However, in a literal sense an orgasm is an extreme fit or sexual peak. These confused sexual feelings foreshadow Pecola's father raping her.

However, if we delve deeper, we realize the terms describing Mary Jane. She is called little, which can simply mean small, but can also mean unimportant. The description of her eyes that Pecola greatly admires is also insulting. The color blue represents depression. Mary Jane's blue eyes are said to be bad-tempered and wicked. This seems to be saying that Mary Jane is a spoiled child. In this description Morrison points out that the character of a person is not important in society. It is their appearance that makes them sweet or appealing.

Morrison uses the word "eat" multiple times to emphasize the word. Thus, it may be a sign to the loss of innocence Pecola is going to face throughout the book. Pecola's desire to be like Mary Jane means changing herself, like she ate the candy with a desire of becoming Mary Jane.

Claudia and Frieda hear their mother talking to herself in the kitchen. She complains about Pecola indirectly for consuming too much milk: "... I ain't feeding no elephants... Anybody need three quarts of milk to live need to get out of here. They in the wrong place. What is this? Some kind of dairy farm?" (16). The word 'elephant' is probably used as a metaphor to imply a pregnant woman. Because people who eat a lot are generally associated with elephants to tease them. In the case of drinking a great amount of milk, it tempts the reader to relate it with pregnancy.

Soon after, Pecola starts to menstruate which means she is able to become pregnant. She is shocked and does not know what to do. So, the girls try to help her but they are blamed for playing nasty as if it was a sexual game. Pecola's pants get stained with blood and they bury them. This scene illustrates how an oppressive society causes women to feel ashamed of one of the most natural parts of their life. The three girls start to discuss love and babies:

Is it true that I can have a baby now?

Sure, said Frieda drowsily. Sure you can.

But. . . how? Her voice was hollow with wonder.

Oh, said Frieda, somebody has to love you.

Oh. . .

Then Pecola asked a question that had never entered my mind.

How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?

But Frieda was asleep. And I didn't know (32).

Here Morrison wants to foreshadow the pregnancy of Pecola as well as shame and sexual abuse. Their discussion show their ignorance because of not having been educated about these issues despite its necessity. They suppose becoming pregnant is possible only by being loved by someone. Pecola sounds desperate as she does not know what it is like to be loved. Frieda shows how naive she is with her notion which relates love and being pregnant. However, life is not always tea and cookies, at least for poor Pecola. It is all about sexuality.

Morrison makes a powerful classification of 'brown girls,' who learn in school "the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave" (Morrison,64). The pursuit of whiteness is the focus of their attention:

They wash themselves with orange-colored Lifebuoy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet talc, clean their teeth with salt on a piece of rag, soften their skin with Jergens Lotion (Morrison,64).

Morrison explains in detail how they think of sexuality by giving the example of Geraldine:

Nor do they know that she will give him her body sparingly and partially. He must enter her surreptitiously, lifting the hem of her nightgown only to her navel. He must rest his weight on his elbows when they make love, ostensibly to avoid hurting her breasts but actually to keep her from having to touch or feel too much of him... While he moves inside her, she will wonder why they didn't put the necessary but private parts of the body in some more convenient place – like the armpit, for example, or the palm of the hand. Somewhere one could get to easily, and quickly, without undressing. She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat- the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs-she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will

make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. She might wonder again, for the six hundredth time, what it would be like to have that feeling while her husband's penis is inside her. The closest thing to it was the time she was walking down the street and her napkin slipped free of her sanitary belt. It moved gently between her legs as she walked. Gently, ever so gently. And then a slight and distinctly delicious sensation collected in her crotch. As the delight grew, she had to stop in the street, hold her thighs together to contain it. That must be what it is like, she thinks, but it never happens while he is inside her. When he withdraws, she pulls her nightgown down, slips out of the bed and into the bathroom with relief (Morrison, 65-66).

Geraldine's way of thinking about sex seems childish according to the paragraph above. As a suppressed woman, Geraldine cannot take pleasure from sex; she only lifts her nightgown to the navel while having sex with her husband, and regards the whole sexual act as a duty to fulfill. She is worried if her hair will get messy or his sweat irritates her.

At a sexual level, alienation is the denial of the body, produced when sensuality is redefined as indecent. Although repression inhibits sexual pleasure, it does not liberate a woman from sexuality. In faking an orgasm, the woman negates her pleasure for the sake of her husband's satisfaction, thus defining herself as a tool of his sexual gratification (Wills, 88).

Geraldine nearly experiences orgasm while walking down the street, when her sanitary napkin has slipped out of its place and when her cat curls into her lap:

She will fondle that soft hill of hair and let the warmth of the animal's body seep over and into the deeply private areas of her lap. . . she opens her legs just a little, and the two of them will be still together . . . until four o'clock, when the intruder comes home (85-86).

Geraldine feels a need for intimacy but she shares it with her cat, rather than her husband and son. Her behaviour is of course not natural. For instance, during sexual intercourse, she does not sweat from her armpits or between her thighs. She represses

her physical self as well as her emotions for her family, and does not give her son the love he needs, dealing only with his material needs. A lot of women's opinions about sexuality are naive unlike the behaviour of both men and the prostitutes mentioned in the novel. The white society have oppressed Geraldine and the black women like her by prescribing roles to blacks which requires servitude and subordination to the whites. These black women have accepted the beauty standards of white people such as making their hair straight like them. They have started to lose their culture by trying to fit to white standards as they have learnt how to behave 'properly'. The suppression of sexuality is also included in the suppression of their character.

Claudia keeps her sanity and is not victimized like Pecola, as her anger helps her to fight back. "Claudia, who survives this story, has the attitude that enables her survival" (Holloway, 41). The oppressive male sexuality which is introduced to her and her sister Frieda has a negative effect on them but it fails to ruin them.

A few reasons make the arrival of Mr. Henry (who moves in as a border with the MacTeers) remarkable to Claudia and Frieda. He praises the girls by calling them Greta Garbo and Ginger Rogers. He talks to them and makes them laugh. He looks and smells nice. He attracts their attention with his show of a disappearing coin which the girls search for on his body.

When Claudia and Frieda see Mr. Henry's pornographic magazines, they discuss what to do: "You want to go up to Mr. Henry's room and look at his girlie magazines? Frieda made an ugly face. She didn't like to look at dirty pictures" (26). While Frieda shows her dislike of those kinds of pictures, Claudia who is the elder sister, does not mind looking at these pictures as this is something they have done before. However, they don't seem to connect any danger with the pictures. Their conversation indicates that even the children find the pornography ordinary as it is regarded as a basic part of the environment in which the girls grow up.

Another event reveals Mr. Henry's real personality. He sends Claudia and Frieda to buy ice cream but they return home earlier than he expects. They see him with two women through the living room window:

He was sucking the fingers of one of the women, whose laughter filled a tiny place over his head. The other woman was buttoning her coat. We knew

immediately who they were, and our flesh crawled. One was China, and the other was called the Maginot Line. The back of my neck itched. These were the fancy women of the maroon nail polish that Mama and Big Mama hated. And in our house. China was not too terrible, at least not in our imaginations. She was thin, aging, absentminded, and unaggressive. But the Maginot Line. That was the one my mother said she "wouldn't let eat out of one of her plates." That was the one church women never allowed their eyes to rest on. That was the one who had killed people, set them on fire, poisoned them, cooked them in lye. Although I thought the Maginot Line's face, hidden under all that fat, was really sweet, I had heard too many black and red words about her, seen too many mouths go triangle at the mention of her name, to dwell on any redeeming features she might have. Showing brown teeth, China seemed to be genuinely enjoying Mr. Henry. The sight of him licking her fingers brought to mind the girlie magazines in his room. A cold wind blew somewhere in me, lifting little leaves of terror and obscure longing (59-60).

The girls recognize the women inside home and they have heard horrible rumours about them. Claudia feels both fear and a weird pleasure. After the prostitutes have left, she does not feel comfortable by looking at Mr. Henry's lips when he is about to drink from a bottle. He tries to explain to the girls that the women are the members of his Bible class. However, both Claudia and Frieda understand that he is not a trustworthy man especially in terms of sexuality when he lies about the women. Claudia also resists the depression she is exposed to. She might have gone through a traumatic experience. She tries to handle this by narrating another similar experience.

On a saturday in Spring, Claudia goes inside and finds Frieda crying. She learns that Mr. MacTeer has beaten up Mr. Henry and kicked him out of the house. Frieda tells the whole story to Claudia. Mr. Henry has made sexual advances at Frieda:

"He... picked at me."

"Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?"

"Sort of."

"He showed his privates at you?"

"Noooo. He touched me."

"Where?"

"Here and here." She pointed to the tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress (Morrison,76).

As read above, Claudia links the experience to Soaphead Church; the nasty old mystic who also harassed Frieda. Claudia's reaction towards this incident reveals that she has knowledge about the subject. James Mayo asserts that she also might have experienced sexual harassment as Pecola did. Mayo also believes that Claudia "has repressed the memory" of her own rape, however, by mourning Pecola's fate in a narrative, Claudia is actually exercising a therapeutic action.

"Why you crying?"

"Miss Dunion came in after everybody was quiet, and Mama and Daddy was fussing about who let Mr. Henry in anyway, and she said that Mama should take me to the doctor, because I might be ruined, and Mama started screaming all over again."

"At you?"

"No. At Miss Dunion."

"But why were you crying?"

"I don't want to be ruined"

"What's ruined?"

"You know. Like the Maginot Line. She's ruined. Mama said so." The tears came back. An image of Frieda, big and fat, came to mind. Her thin legs swollen, her face surrounded by layers of rouged skin. I too begin to feel tears.

"But, Frieda, you could exercise and not eat." She shrugged. "Besides, what about China and Poland? They're ruined too, aren't they? And they ain't fat."

"That's because they drink whiskey. Mama says whiskey ate them up."

"You could drink whiskey."

"Where would I get whiskey?" We thought about this. Nobody would sell it to us; we had no money, anyway. There was never any in our house. Who would have some? "Pecola," I said. "Her father's always drunk. She can get us some."

"You think so?"

"Sure. Cholly's always drunk. Let's go ask her. We don't have to tell her what for" (78).

After Frieda was molested by the tenant Mr. Henry, she ran to tell her parents. Mr. MacTeer chased Mr. Henry off, beating him first and then shooting him. Miss Dunion, a neighbor, came over afterward and suggested that the MacTeers take Frieda to the doctor to see if she has been 'ruined'; a suggestion that sent Mrs. MacTeer into a rage against Miss. Dunion. However, Frieda started to cry because Miss Dunion's words have taken hold; she is worried now that she's 'ruined'. Frieda equates being "ruined" to being like Maginot Line, because she heard her mother say that Maginot Line is a 'ruined' woman. They also misinterpret Mrs. MacTeer's words about Frieda's "ruin," misunderstanding the words of adults. Both of the girls think that being ruined means becoming fat like Marie, and believe that Poland and China aren't fat only because they drink whiskey. Claudia suggests that they try to get Pecola to help them find some whiskey, reasoning that Pecola should be able to help them because her father is always drunk. On their way to find Pecola, Claudia and Frieda come across Maginot Line and she offers to wait with them for Pecola;

"You can wait for her. Wanna come up here and wait?"

... "No, ma'am."

"Well," the Maginot Line seemed interested in our problem. "Yo can go to her mama's work place, but it's way over by the lake."

... "Why don't you wait for her? You can come up here. Want some pop?" ... I moved to go up the stairs, but Frieda said, "No, ma'am, we ain't allowed." I was amazed at her courage, and frightened of her sassiness. The smile of the Maginot Line slipped. "Ain't 'llowed?"

"No'm."

"Ain't 'llowed to what?"

"Go in your house."

"Is that right?" The waterfalls were still. "How come?"

"My mama said so. My mama said you ruined." The waterfalls began to run again. She put the root-beer bottle to her lips and drank it empty. With a graceful movement of the wrist, a gesture so quick and small we never really saw it, only remembered it afterward, she tossed the bottle over the rail at us"

(Morrison, 80).



The courtesy and hospitality of Maginot Line are real, but she doesn't show patience for the girls' disrespectful behaviour. The girls' insult of Maginot Line demonstrates that the girls are influenced by their mother's opinion. Their unkind treatment of the prostitute is their childhood ignorance rather than malice.

As the theme of the novel is about the pain of being an outcast, it is important to mention how Frieda treats the prostitutes very poorly. Scarcity of love can be witnessed in the treatment of Maginot Line and the other prostitutes. For the girls, their mother's word is law: They dislike Maginot Line based on their mother's dislike of Maginot Line.

On the other hand, young Pauline is pervaded by fantasies of men and love. "Her twisted emotions provide the yielding earth for the tenacious seeds of the Cinderella complex which is women's fear of independence, as an unconscious desire to be taken care of by others" (Brass & Kley, 171).

Pauline was fifteen, still keeping house, but with less enthusiasm. Fantasies about men and love and touching were drawing her mind and hands away from her work. Changes in weather began to affect her, as did certain sights and sounds. These feelings translated themselves to her in extreme melancholy. She thought of the death of newborn things, lonely roads, and strangers who appear out of nowhere simply to hold one's hand, woods in which the sun was always setting. In church especially did these dreams grow. The songs caressed her, and while she tried to hold her mind on the wages of sin, her body trembled for redemption, salvation, a mysterious rebirth that would simply happen, with no effort on her part. In none of her fantasies was she ever aggressive; she was usually idling by the river bank, or gathering berries in a field when a someone appeared, with gentle and penetrating eyes, who-with no exchange of words-understood; and before whose glance her foot straightened and her eyes dropped. The someone had no face, no form, no voice, no odor. He was a simple Presence, an all-embracing tenderness with strength and a promise of rest. It did not matter that she had no idea of what to do or say to the Presence-after the wordless knowing and the soundless touching, her dreams disintegrated. But the Presence would know what to do. She had only to lay her head on his chest and

he would lead her away to the sea, to the city, to the woods... forever (Morrison, 88).

Sexual oppression is closely related to race discrimination in a society. Pauline Breedlove is a poor woman who is beaten down in soul and body, disabled in spirit, her emotional and physical death summarized in the word 'ugly'. But she was not always like that:

Pauline was leaning idly on the fence, her arms resting on the cross rail between the pickets... While smiling to herself and holding fast to the break in somber thoughts, she felt something tickling her foot. She laughed aloud and turned to see. The whistler was bending down tickling her foot and kissing her leg. She could not stop her laughter-not until he looked up at her and she saw the Kentucky sun drenching the yellow, heavy-lidded eyes of Cholly Breedlove (89).

This pleasant scene is one of the few truly innocent moments we encounter in the novel. It makes us wonder what the Breedloves' relationship might have been like if they had lived in a different time and place.

Pauline and Cholly loved each other. He seemed to relish her company and even to enjoy her country ways and lack of knowledge about city things. He talked with her about her foot and asked, when they walked through the town or in the fields, if she were tired. Instead of ignoring her infirmity, pretending it was not there, he made it seem like something special and endearing. For the first time Pauline felt that her bad foot was an asset. And he did touch her, firmly but gently, just as she had dreamed. But minus the gloom of setting suns and lonely river banks. She was secure and grateful; he was kind and lively. She had not known there was so much laughter in the world (Morrison,90).

However, things change after years have passed. Pecola's parents treat harshly and impolitely towards each other. Their sexual life is also influenced by this. "Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking" (32).

Afterwards, Pecola visits the women upstairs, wondering what love feels like:

How do grown-ups act when they love each other? Eat fish together? Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed. He making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence (44).

Pecola is confused by her parents having sex and the prostitutes conversation about their boyfriends. She is irritated by her father's sounds of lovemaking and terrified by her mother's not making any sound.

Her parents used to love each other but in time it has changed into a power struggle. They started to abuse each other; more interestingly, they seemed to need this. Pauline wanted to become a martyr who has to suffer. As a result Cholly would be judged by Jesus for his violent behaviour. Pauline looked down on him and needs him to continue to be a vulgar. Because she wishes to use her oppressed self to righteously punish and surpress him. Cholly needed Mrs. Breedlove for the same reason.

Pauline hates her life and as Pecola and her brother are a part of her life, she does not treat them well. Pecola calls her mother as Mrs. Breedlove which shows how weak their relationship is. It is tragic to see that Pecola regards herself inferior. Her behaviour is based on her feelings of inferiority which are caused by the movies she watched for aspiration. These films introduce her romantic love and physical beauty based on white standards.

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. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self contempt by the heap. She forgot lust and simple caring for. She regarded love as possessive mating, and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way (95).

In *The Bluest Eye*, women take a subordinate position even in their sex lives. Cholly is representative of men who do not respect women in all aspects. His attitude to women is based on his prior humiliations and disgraces, such as the unmemorable experience of his first sexual intercourse. What we know of Cholly is that he is in the prime of sexual experimentation. While in the midst of losing his virginity after the funeral for his closest relative, Cholly and his sexual partner, Darlene, were discovered in a field by two white hunters. They kept the flashlight on them and watched Cholly and the girl. The shocked couple were interrupted and humiliated by these white men.

There stood two white men. One with a spirit lamp, the other with a flashlight. There was no mistake about their being white; he could smell it. Cholly jumped, trying to kneel, stand and get his pants up all in one motion. The men had long guns (116).

With guns in hand, the two white men forced Cholly to continue the act while addressing him by various offensive names and criticizing his sexual performance. Cholly could not react and more, he felt as if he had no right to hate them. Instead he hated and despised the girl. This was all he could do. He wanted to relieve himself by taking revenge on someone weaker than himself. Cholly and Darlene are the victims of dehumanization at the hands of two white men.

The white men turn the act of sex into rape. Cholly is forced to physically rape Darlene, while the two white men psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually rape Cholly. For Cholly, sex is transformed from an act of pleasure and desire into one of hate and control. Cholly's acts "with a violence born of total helplessness" (116). He continues to act with similar violence throughout the rest of his life. The experience of humiliation during his first sex led Cholly to take revenge. Therefore, he treats his wife carelessly and cold-heartedly while having sex.

"The obvious relation between power and the phallic symbol represented in the long guns cannot be ignored. The symbol of light held by these two men in the form of a spirit lamp and a flashlight also cannot be dismissed from the events that follow" (Thomas, 168). The two men order Cholly:

"Get on wid it, nigger!"

He dropped back to his knees... With a violence born of total helplessness, he pulled her dress up, lowered his trousers and underwear. [...] He could do no more than make- believe. (...) Cholly, moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her. He almost wished he could do it- hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much (Morrison, 116).

Sullen, irritable, he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess-that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men-but not now. Not in impotence but later, when the hatred could find sweet expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. The hee-hee-hee's. He recalled Darlene's dripping hair ribbon, flapping against her face as they walked back in silence in the rain. The loathing that galloped through him made him tremble (Morrison, 118).

Cholly is too hopeless to hate the white men. Instead he hates the black girl, Darlene. Because he thinks he can put the blame on her as she is black as well as weak and inferior. He feels so desperate that even the idea of hating the white men would destroy him psychologically.

Thus, this scene demonstrates more than just Cholly's anger at Darlene; the early adolescent trauma that would affect all of his engagements with women. The scene presents Cholly as impotent. It is not that he is not able to have sex, but rather he will be unable to engage desire. Cholly is an example of the incapacity to reproduce. Again, there is the distinction between physical reproduction and the 'continuation' of his species. As his eroticism is distorted by the event of his youth, one cannot ignore this factor in favor of an eroticism represented in Pauline's expression.

After a period of time in their marriage, he ceases to care about Pauline's desires or feelings, except for a few moments of happiness. Moreover, being a black man, Cholly needs to demonstrate his dominance in the society by adapting the norms of the patriarchal social order. Pauline and his children are the only ones whom he can make feel inferior to him. "Pauline was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires" (Morrison, 31). By raping Pecola, which he regards as a treatment for her unhappiness, Cholly contributes to the destruction of her already damaged personality.

"If Cholly cannot engage his lovers, who, then, is the object of Pauline's desire? With whom does Pauline experience the magnificent show of erotic love? It is not merely that Morrison portrays Pauline as someone completely infused in fantastical images of romance" (Thomas, 167). Consider, in her words, the theatrics expressed in this love-making scene:

I want to pretend sleep and have him keep on rubbing my stomach. Then he will lean his head down and bite my tit. Then I don't want him to rub my stomach anymore. I want him to put his hand between my legs. I pretend to wake up, and turn to him, but not opening my legs. I want him to open them for me. He does, and I be soft and wet where his fingers are strong and hard. I be softer than I ever been before. All my strength in his hand. My brain curls up like wilted leaves. A funny, empty feeling is in my hands. I want to grab holt of something, so I hold his head... His mouth is under my chin. Then I don't want his hand between my legs no more, because I think I am softening away. I stretch my legs open, and he is on top of me. Too heavy to hold, and too light not to. He puts his thing in me. In me. In me. I wrap my feet around his back so he can't get away. His face is next to mine. The bed springs sounds like them crickets used to back home. He puts his fingers in mine, and we stretches our arm outwise like Jesus on the cross. I hold on tight. My fingers and my feet hold on tight, because everything else is going, going. I know he wants me to come first. But I can't. Not until he does. Not until I feel him loving me. Just me (100).

As it is easy to see, Cholly does not take any part in this scene. Pauline needs to feel being loved by her husband and her orgasm depends on this feeling completely. She

wants to experience both sexuality and romance. She longs for something to hold on; to love and to be loved; the feeling of belonging to someone. She wants to feel secure and desirable. Pauline summarizes his behaviour towards her as well as the way she feels during their intercourse:

He used to come easing into bed sometimes, not too drunk. I make out like I'm asleep... I take my fingers out of his and put my hands on his behind. My legs drop back onto the bed. I don't make no noise, because the chil'ren might hear. I begin to feel those little bits of color floating up into me-deep in me. That streak of green from the June-bug light, the purple from the berries trickling along my thighs, Mama's lemonade yellow runs sweet in me. Then I feel like I'm laughing between my legs, and the laughing gets all mixed up with the color, and I'm afraid I'll come, and afraid I won't. But I know I will. And I do. And it be rainbow all inside. And it lasts and lasts and lasts. I want to thank him, but don't know how, so I pat him like you do a baby. He asks me if I'm all right. I say yes. He gets off me and lies down to sleep. I want to say something, but I don't (100-101).

If Cholly is not too drunk, they have sex and then he falls asleep. Pauline feels alone and this quote above is like a masturbatory scene rather than having sex with the person you love. Masturbation isn't directly mentioned, but it is the focus of attention for an alienated black woman.

So it was on a Saturday afternoon, in the thin light of spring, he staggered home reeling drunk and saw his daughter in the kitchen... Leaning over a fence staring at nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth. He did it then, and startled Pauline into laughter. He did it now. The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours toward her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke. Pecola lost her balance and was about to careen to the floor" (127).

Cholly doesn't have any idea how he feels. He is caught between love and hatred. His cruel behaviour towards Pecola contrasts with his tenderness he expresses to his daughter: "What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile?" (161). Rhetorical questions contribute to confusion: "Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child – unburdened - why wasn't she happy?" (161).

As he is very drunk, Cholly can not see the answer to his questions which is quite obvious. Another reason for his behaviour is that he did not have real parents needed for his upbringing. So, he doesn't know how to care for his children.

After the event, Cholly feels guilty without knowing the reason: "hatred mixed with tenderness" (163). His guilt and embarrassment lead him to hate the women he had sex with, rather than hating himself. Cholly has socially impaired interactions with females throughout the novel.

When Cholly was a teenager, he had no one to help him to overcome a difficult situation. Although his depression was postponed, it was inevitable. He could not go through by himself without support. As he had not been protected, he cannot protect his own child. Thus, his 'protectiveness' of Pecola causes her destruction.

Cholly is attracted by Pecola's foot and leg, because she reminds him of Pauline the day he watched her scratch her leg. Pauline's foot was crippled, so he wanted to take care of her. Morrison indirectly puts the blame on the bad circumstances which caused people to commit such acts rather than make people guilty of such incestuous crimes. Cholly felt it necessary to give a part of himself to Pecola as she was so desperate and helpless. He also wanted to help Pecola with romantic interest. Although Cholly's actions are incomprehensible, we as readers are expected to show sympathy for him because of the damaging experiences he endured throughout his life. His sympathy and aggression towards Pecola is a result of his traumatic suffering. It urges us to ask what suffering he endured in order to commit such an awful crime against his own daughter. Toni Morrison also represents these kinds of sexual experiences as cruel and humiliating by implying that sexual adulthood is traumatic in an abusive and abnormal environment.



One Saturday afternoon in the spring, Cholly arrived home drunk and saw Pecola in the kitchen standing at the sink and washing dishes. First he felt uncomfortable and then it turned into pleasure and attraction.

Her small back hunched over the sink. Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt. Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort dissolve into pleasure. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence. Her back hunched that way; her head to one side as though crouching from a permanent and unrelieved blow. Why did she have to look so whipped? ... What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him – the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? ... His hatred of her slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit (Morrison, 127)

Morrison describes Cholly's hatred for his daughter because her love for him makes him aware of his failures. It was the most tragic part of the novel when his emotions become confused, leading him to commit sexual violence.

It was as if he felt an accusation in her clear state of misery. "He wanted to break her neck - but tenderly" (127). He couldn't imagine what he could say to his eleven year old daughter to make her happy. He knew if he called to her she would look at him with love which he did not deserve and could not understand. He hated her and felt as though he would vomit looking at her. Just before he did, she shifted her weight and scratched the back of her calf with her toe. It was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her. The wondering softness of the gesture filled him with a desire to protect.

Cholly raised his other hand to her hips to save her from falling. He put his head down and nibbled the back of her leg. His mouth trembled at the firm sweetness of the flesh. He closed his eyes, letting his fingers dig into her waist. The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been. The confused mixture of his memories of

Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her – tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear (Morrison,128).

“He put his head down and nibbles at the back of her leg” (128). This is the exactly what Cholly first did when he saw Pauline. Morrison continues with, “The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus” (128). Cholly is aroused by the fact that in doing this to his daughter, he is reminded of the days in which he and Pauline were in love. The lack of communication between husband and wife drives Cholly to seek someone else to connect with. Alcoholism, combined with Cholly’s mixed sense of what is right and wrong, leads him to choose Pecola.

His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made – a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. Following the disintegration – the falling away – of sexual desire, he was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrists, the fingers clenching, but whether her grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion, he could not tell. Removing himself from her was so painful to him he cut it short and snatched his genitals out of the dry harbour of her vagina. She appeared to have fainted. Cholly stood up and could see only her grayish panties, so sad and limp around her ankles. Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up; the tenderness forced him to cover her. So when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her (Morrison, 128-129).

Being humiliated during his first sexual experience with Darlene, Cholly now acts as a humiliator by raping Pecola. As she is shocked, she can not shout or resist and this makes Cholly treat her with more cruelty. However, Pecola is just a child who doesn’t know how to fight against cruelty.

As a consequence, Cholly who is the abused child, becomes the abusive parent, whose daughter becomes the victim of his confused feelings. His ruined love, mixed with sick anger, makes him sexually molest her. He both wants to hurt and care for her. As he is confused, he covers her with with a blanket after the rape which illustrates how he cares for her in his own perverted way. However, this does not prevent him in the first place. "Being abused by both parents, by Cholly raping her and her mother not believing her, Pecola becomes a victim of trauma who would be unable or unwilling to tell the story of her rape. This is why the rape is not related with Pecola, but: . . . related through the eyes of the abuser" (Surayni,15).

While reading about the rape through Cholly's inner voice, we as readers realize how Pecola's traumatic experiences have explained her voicelessness and how Cholly becomes victim to his own emotionally twisted self. As Samuels and Hudson-Weems put it: "...he above all remains incapable of providing the fertile parental soil a child needs to grow and develop a positive sense of self. He is without role models" (14).

Pecola is alienated from society when she becomes pregnant. Therefore, she has to quit school. Pecola becomes more obsessed with having blue eyes day by day. She has been pushed to despair and the only thing she does is to pray for them for so long. Eventually, this obsession takes her to Soaphead Church who is the famous fortune teller and reader of dreams, but also known for being a pedophile:

The careful design was marred occasionally by rare but keen sexual cravings. He could have been an active homosexual but lacked the courage. Bestiality did not occur to him, and sodomy was quite out of the question, for he did not experience sustained erections and could not endure the thought of somebody else's. And besides, the one thing that disgusted him more than entering and caressing a woman was caressing and being caressed by a man. In any case, his cravings, although intense, never relished physical contact. He abhorred flesh on flesh. Body odor, breath odor, overwhelmed him. The sight of dried matter in the corner of the eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, skin crusts-all the natural excretions and protections the body was capable of-disquieted him. His attentions therefore gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive-children. And since he was too diffident to confront homosexuality, and since little boys were insulting, scary, and stubborn, he

further limited his interests to little girls. They were usually manageable and frequently seductive. His sexuality was anything but lewd; his patronage of little girls smacked of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness. He was what one might call a very clean old man (Morrison, 131).

There was always an imbalance between how whites and non-whites were treated by the society, how they were educated by using their privilege which they had from birth. Morrison mentions how people like Soaphead Church got an education which was supposed to be better than non-whites due to their race. The families like Soaphead's were proud of their academic accomplishments and their mixed blood, believing the former was based on the latter.

With the confidence born of a conviction of superiority, they performed well at schools. They were industrious, orderly, and energetic, hoping to prove beyond a doubt De Gobineau's hypothesis that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it." Thus, they were seldom overlooked by schoolmasters who recommended promising students for study abroad. The men studied medicine, law, theology, and emerged repeatedly in the powerless government offices available to the native population (Morrison, 133).

Soaphead does not like adults and people in general. This makes him direct his sexual desires towards children, who are pure and easy to deceive. To quote Rubenstein: "Soaphead Church is a pedophile; little girls are the only sexual objects who do not threaten his fragile and sterile masculinity" (140). His marriage was a failure and his father used to beat him when he was a child. These are some of the reasons which caused him to have a distorted personality. The passage below shows that he is also a fetishist:

All his life he had had a fondness for things, not the acquisition of wealth or beautiful objects, but a genuine love of worn objects: a coffee pot that had been his mother's, a welcome mat from the door of a rooming house he once lived in, a quilt from a Salvation Army store counter. It was as though his disdain of

human contact had converted itself into a craving for things humans had touched. The residue of the human spirit smeared on inanimate objects was all he could withstand of humanity. To contemplate, for example, evidence of human footsteps on the mat-absorb the smell of the quilt and wallow in the sweet certainty that many bodies had sweated, slept, dreamed, made love, been ill, and even died under it. Wherever he went, he took along his things, and was always searching for others. This thirst for worn things led him to casual but habitual examinations of trash barrels in alleys and wastebaskets in public places... All in all, his personality was an arabesque: intricate, symmetrical, balanced, and tightly constructed-except for one flaw. The careful design was marred occasionally by rare but keen sexual cravings. ( Morrison,131).

Soaphead Church does not have a regular job and he comes to Lorain, Ohio. He doesn't show any interest in the people living there. The community finds his celibacy supernatural and he is given an almost divine position in the community: "He became a Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams. It was a profession that suited him well. . . . and he had numerous opportunities to witness human stupidity... Celibacy was a haven, silence a shield" (131).

Soaphead feels superior to other people. His family heritage of British nobility, his celibacy and his various academic achievements have set him apart from more common blacks. He looks down on his visitors, scorning their requests about love and money, claiming that he would have done a better job than God who created the universe. Furthermore, he does not deny that his relationship with female children are twisted. The readers are convinced that he is a fraud and a charlatan when Pecola comes to see him, asking him to grant her blue eyes:

Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. . . A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. His outrage grew and felt like power. For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles ( Morrison, 138).

Soaphead Church promises Pecola that she will have blue eyes. He knows that this is an act of deception but he does not care as he realizes that she cannot challenge him. He assures Pecola that she will have blue eyes. Soaphead then writes a letter to God where he expresses an anger at Him for not seeing the ugly little girl who has come for blue eyes. He blames God for his lust and creating evil. He justifies his sexual desire for little girls by putting the blame on God:

Let me tell you now about the breasts of little girls. . . . Do I have to apologize for loving strangers? But you too are amiss here, Lord. How, why, did you allow it to happen? . . . The love of them - the touch, taste, and feel of them - was not just an easy luxurious human vice; they were, for me, A Thing To Do Instead. Instead of Papa, instead of the Cloth, instead of Velma, and I chose not to do without them (Morrison, 141-142).

His words ensure Pecola's fate as she puts her trust and faith in this reader of dreams. In fact, he is also a victim of his life experience. He is not the wise man Pecola believes him to be, nor he will help her by making her pretty. In fact, he is a danger to society. Because he believes he has a God-given right to violate little girls. Although he does not touch Pecola, he violates her mentally, and in doing so, Soaphead claims to correct what God has done wrong. According to Rubenstein, he violates her spiritual innocence as surely as her father abuses her physical innocence (142). Cholly Breedlove and Soaphead's actions are both destructive for Pecola. Had it not been for her father's perverted behaviour and violent sexuality, Pecola would not have been in this state of madness. Still, what has gone wrong with Pecola, as well as Soaphead himself, is not the result of the actions of God, but the actions of people.

Earlier in the story, Maureen endears herself to Pecola and buys her ice cream. By doing this, Maureen wants to learn more about the boys who bullied Pecola. Then, she brings the subject to nudity. She starts to ask her to learn if she has ever seen a naked man:

Pecola blinked, then looked away. "No. Where would I see a naked man?"  
"I don't know. I just asked."

“I wouldn’t even look at him, even if I did see him. That’s dirty. Who wants to see a naked man?” Pecola was agitated. “Nobody’s father would be naked in front of his own daughter. Not unless he was dirty too.”

“I didn’t say father. I just said, a naked man.”

“Well. . .”

“How come you said, father?” Maureen wanted to know (55).

At this point, Claudia intervenes and defends Pecola in order to prevent Maureen insulting Pecola. She actually does not want to remember the moment she and Frieda saw their father naked while he was going to his bedroom from the bathroom. She feels ashamed but refers to it as ‘friendly-like’ (Morrison, 55).

After it is revealed that Pecola has seen her daddy naked, the girls’ quarrel turns into a fight. Maureen starts to insult them by calling Pecola’s father black. She continues her insults: “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!” (73). The subject changes from whether Pecola has seen her father naked to the subject of beauty and race. By linking sexuality with race, she degrades them twice. Claudia sees Pecola is oppressed by observing her attitudes that time: “Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it where it could lap up into her eyes” (57).

The adults around Pecola treat her badly except for Claudia’s parents and the prostitutes who give importance to Pecola and regard her as an individual. Mr. Henry, Geraldine, Pauline, Cholly and Soaphead are all characters whose sexuality are distorted. Thus, the social environment around Pecola is like ‘the unyielding earth’ where nothing can grow (Morrison, 4).

The mistreated people are attracted to the purity of children making them beautiful and desirable. So, they were drawn to what they lacked: cleanliness. “His patronage of little girls smacked of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness.” (Morrison, 168).

Female children draw men’s attention like Cholly, Soaphead, and Henry. The children are vulnerable towards the most masculine act of aggression: sex. “He wanted

to break her neck, but tenderly” (161). Morrison argues that the sexual abuse of children can be related to the societal abuse that African American men endure. As black men are oppressed by the white society, they abuse female children in return. Morrison does not mean black men are cruel, but rather that this is the dangerous result of racial persecution. She blames society for being the enemy and avoids accusing only the villains seen on the surface: black men. Because of this, readers might feel discomfort as they themselves have been indirectly blamed for the tragic fate of a young girl. It may seem difficult for readers to understand this type of destruction. The reason why this novel was banned in some schools in the USA is probably the grim reality it expresses. However, one should delve deeper and comprehend the suffering and pain which is the result of social constructs.

Morrison exemplifies the consequences of racial prejudices and the damaging impact they have on the most vulnerable members of society. She brilliantly demonstrates a cycle of oppression by the dominating group which eventually effects society’s weakest individuals. “This book is about the horrid destruction of society that occurs when oppression is permitted, when racism is permitted, and when abuse is permitted” (Lazarescu, 12).

The devastation of oppression gave rise to self contempt within the oppressed population that ultimately give justification for future abuse. By including such sexually graphic depictions, Morrison leaves a lasting impression with her reader and more effectively conveys her message.

In *The Bluest Eye*, sexuality serves as an indicator of how oppressive and ill-minded a society is. Rather than trying to solve the problems, the society chooses the easy way: to blame the oppressed for being weak. In this chapter, it is demonstrated that sexual oppression is clearly the most cruel and devastating kind of oppression.



## CONCLUSION

*The Bluest Eye* is written in such a way that each sentence needs to be read carefully in order not to miss the implicit message. The great author, Toni Morrison examines the crucial subjects like oppression, gender and sexuality elaborately. It is impossible for the readers not to be influenced by the incidents in the story which can hurt and shock them.

In the novel, Morrison challenges Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Using whiteness as a standard of beauty devalues blackness. The novel tries to put an end to this tendency. Morrison illustrates not only the positive images of blackness but also the damage that the black women characters tolerate because of the construction of femininity in a racialized society. As Gurleen Grewal argues; “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” (Grewal, 21). Although the concept of beauty is a focus of attention for a lot of women, it is less likely for black women to compete with white women. Because a woman with blue eyes and light skin is regarded as possessing the ideal of beauty. Morrison’s novel shows how the black women characters suffer in trying to adapt this ideology.

*The Bluest Eye* demonstrates how a patriarchal and sexist community establishes a ground for sexual abnormality. The sexual behaviour of the characters is reflection of the society in which they live. Especially the men in the novel harm women and young girls, through their damaging sexual behaviours. Their sick sexuality contrasts with the innocent love and affection between the child characters.

The novel serves as a device to show how gendered oppression in Western society marks individuals and relationships. Morrison criticizes the African American community for oppressing women and children. She puts the blame on the community for not fighting against it.

Morrison argues that individuals, particularly children devoid of attention and love from their parents, will suffer from it throughout their lives. If they were subjected

to incest sexuality, the consequences are individually and culturally destructive. As Samuels and Hudson-Weems note with reference to *The Bluest Eye*;

Although now a highly publicized topic, child abuse, including incest and rape, was once a socially unmentionable subject that remained unaddressed though secretly known. It is readily explored by Morrison, however, in her pioneering first novel (Holm, 14).

As demonstrated in my thesis, Morrison's narrative explores the issues related to the mistreatment of people particularly children. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, is the example of children suffering from abuse. She becomes the victim of pedophilia and incestuous behaviour. Morrison's point of view about oppression parallels Marx's saying, quoted in Schmidt's article:

Though class society appears to be the source, the cause of the oppression of women, it is rather its consequence. Thus, it is only at the last culmination of the development of class society [that] this, its secret, appear [s] again, namely that on the one hand it is the product of the oppression of women, and that on the other it is the means by which women participate in and create their own oppression (Schmidt, 305).

The subjects of this novel which are mainly violence, alcohol, poverty, lack of self-confidence, pedophilia, abuse, shame, incest and desperateness are linked to oppression. White society oppressed blacks, children suffer from both lack of love and oppression. The oppressed people are influenced by their hostile environment which shapes their personality. Men carry out the most devastating and unjust misuse of power. They use their authority as men in their sexuality in a humiliating way. Their victims are women and children.

Toni Morrison enables the oppressors to be understood by relating their stories in such a flawless way. She succeeds in trying to make the readers reason the acts of abusive behaviour. She focuses on the reasons more than the results in her social criticism. She also educates her readers about the treatment of children who are the adults of the future. We shape their personality by providing guidance and love which will determine their sanity. Mothers' and fathers' mistakes result in broken childhoods

which will always be there like a punishment. We have much to learn from her story in terms of the consequences of our actions as individuals in a society.

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