



Beauty, Whiteness, and Alienation: The Fragmentation of Black Identity in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)

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Abstract:

*This article explores the representation of internalized racism and the fragmentation of Black identity in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, through a close analysis of characters Maureen Peal and Pecola Breedlove. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's concept of false identity and Frantz Fanon's theory of racial alienation, the paper argues that Morrison not only critiques external systems of racial oppression but also unveils how Black self-perception is distorted by the internalization of white beauty standards. While Maureen Peal represents privilege through proximity to whiteness, Pecola embodies the psychic collapse caused by exclusion. By juxtaposing these characters, Morrison highlights the ontological violence inflicted by racial hierarchies and calls for a radical reimagining of Black subjectivity.*

Keywords: *beauty, Black identity, internalized racism, racial alienation, whiteness*

Beauté, blancheur et aliénation : la fragmentation de l'identité noire dans *The Bluest Eye* (1970) de Toni Morrison

Résumé :

Cet article explore la représentation du racisme intériorisé et la fragmentation de l'identité noire dans le roman de Toni Morrison intitulé « The Bluest Eye ». A travers une analyse approfondie des personnages Maureen Peal et Pecola Breedlove, il s'appuie sur le concept de fausse identité de Sigmund Freud et sur la théorie de l'aliénation raciale de Frantz Fanon. Cet article démontre que Toni Morrison ne dénonce pas seulement les systèmes externes d'oppression raciale, mais révèle également comment la perception de soi des Noirs est déformée par l'intériorisation des normes de beauté blanches. Tandis que le personnage Maureen Peal représente le privilège par sa proximité avec la blancheur, Pecola incarne l'effondrement psychique causé par l'exclusion. Toni Morrison, à travers ses personnages met en lumière la violence ontologique infligée par les hiérarchies raciales et appelle à une réinvention radicale de la subjectivité noire.

Mots-clés : *beauté, identité noire, racisme intériorisé, aliénation raciale, blancheur*



Introduction

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) remains one of the most searing examinations of how racialized ideals of beauty function as a form of cultural domination in the United States. Published at height of the Black Arts Movement, Morrison's first novel is at once a literary experiment and a political critique, challenging readers to confront the deep psychological scars left by white supremacy. Set in Lorain, Ohio, in the early 1940s, the novel tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl whose desperate wish for blue eyes symbolizes both her yearning for acceptance and her internalization of an oppressive cultural order. As Morrison explains in her foreword, the novel emerged from her desire to address the question of "how one learns that she is not the chosen one". The child who desires blue eyes does not so because the surrounding culture has already determined what counts as beautiful, lovable, and worthy. The historical setting of the novel intensifies Morrison's critique. The 1940s marked a period in which Black communities were subjected not only to segregationist practices but also to cultural messages that equated beauty with whiteness. Shirley Temple, Hollywood cinema; and the Dick-and-Jane school primers presented images of innocence, desirability, and normalcy, as Bell hooks argues, function to "colonized the imagination of children, leaving little space for alternative forms of self-recognition"¹. Morrison dramatizes this colonization through the character of Pecola Breedlove, whose tragic longing for blue eyes is emblematic of a

¹ Bell, Hooks. *Black Looks and Representation* p7

broader psychic and cultural crisis. At the same time, Morrison resists reducing Black identity to victimhood alone. Through the narrative voice of Claudia Macteer, the novel presents alternative responses to white beauty standards, including resistance, critique, and the possibility of reimagining beauty itself. Claudia's refusal to accept the value of white dolls stands in stark contrast to Pecola's tragic internalization, suggesting that Morrison is not only diagnosing a cultural pathology but also opening space for counter-discourse. This article seeks to examine Morrison's novel through these questions: How does Morrison portray Eurocentric beauty standards as a mechanism of oppression in *The Bluest Eye*? How does Morrison represent alienation and the fragmentation of Black Identity as consequences of these oppressive ideals?

1. Beauty and Whiteness

1.1. Beauty as an instrument of Oppression

Beauty can be regarded as the quality of being physically attractive or the qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts mind or spirit, in other word loveliness². In *The Bluest Eye*, beauty is more than an aesthetic ideal, it functions as a cultural weapon, shaping social hierarchies and individual self-perceptions. Morrison demonstrates that Eurocentric beauty standards operate as mechanisms of oppression, teaching Black children that their natural features are inherently undesirable. Pecola Breedlove embodies the tragic consequences of this indoctrination, internalizing the belief that blue eyes are an emblem of whiteness would make her lovable and worthy. As the

² This definition is extracted from The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. New ed.2004.



narrator says “it had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different” (*TBE* 46)³. Here the desire for transformation is inseparable from a desire for social acceptance, showing how beauty is deeply implicated in systems of value and power.

The novel shows Pecola’s longing within a broader cultural context saturated with white representations of beauty. To better influence the black culture, Whites use some strategies to alienate more Blacks by using cinema, media, books, magazine, movies, advertising to promote their culture considered as the best. According to Gramsci “the dominant class diffuses ideals throughout the entire society by means of institution”⁴ (Gramsci, 2015, p.3). In America, Hollywood as a cinematic apparatus, is implicated in the diffraction of a fallacious ideology, which intends to disseminate a disturbing paradigm of whiteness/beauty⁵ (S. Azouz, 2008, p.3). For illustration, Shirley Temple, the idealized child actress, serves as a recurring symbol of what is considered pure, innocent, and desirable. The Dick-and-Jane primers further reinforce normative visions of white family life, and depicting blond children and ordered households while rendering Black experiences invisible. As Bell Hooks notes, these cultural messages “colonize the

³ TBE stands for *The Bluest Eye*

⁴ Savannah Bowman, “The soil is bad for certain kinds of Flowers: Dominant Cultural Narratives and the Impact of Community in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. 2015

⁵ Samy Azouz, “Cinema and ideology in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison”, volume IV, number 2, fall 2008.

imagination" of Black children, making alternative forms of self-recognition almost unimaginable

Whites promote their own image as good and beautiful to spread their hegemony through popular culture and media. Film reinforces to Pecola the conviction that she is ugly, because she has "support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance" (*TBE* 39). Whites use publicity (the fact of displaying pictures in given area) to captivate Blacks' attention. For example, Pecola and Maureen are going past the Dreamland Theater's, they see "Betty Grable" (a white actress) on the posters. Furthermore, Pecola tells Maureen Peal how she loves "Hedy Lamarr" (*TBE* 69). Then, Maureen relates the story of a girl named Audrey who comes in a beauty salon and asks the lady to fix her hair like Hedy Lamarr's. Through this story, we see clearly the strong desire of people to identify themselves with white stars.

Whites use all possible things (posters, billboards) to recall Blacks that they are the only master in America society. For example, through advertising (media, a specific message in order to influence the memory of the viewers) to such an extent "shops, magazine, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (*TBE*. 20). To such a degree even "picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls" (*TBE* 20).

The presence of material goods as dolls, drinking cup (Shirley Temple cup) and candies (Mary Jane candy) with white image is a strategy to promote white culture as the best one which can be existed all over the world. Their presence is a way to affect Blacks' mind. It is the case of the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove during her stay in Macteers'



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family. She drinks milk in “Shirley Temple Cup”, a white child actress that she sees in on-screen. Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple Cup. She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face (TBE 19). Indeed, the fact of drinking in this cup is a sign of White’s dominance. There are also candies made with white actress images. Pecola goes to the white shopkeeper to buy candies. This is noticeable through these excerpts:

Each pale-yellow wrapper has 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 eye looking at her out of a world of clean comfort...she eats the candy, and its sweetness is good (TBE 50).

In John Bishop’s article “*Morrison’s The Bluest Eye*”, Bishop Focuses on Hollywood’s effect on teaching the young girls what “Pretty” means. He says “The adoption of Hollywood’s image of beauty: Black is ugly, and Mulatto is pretty and by extension, Shirley Temple is prettier still...and therefore anything that is not Shirley temple or Mary Jane is not pretty”⁶. As Azouz opines: “Filmic images depict the splendor and sumptuousness of everything that denotes whiteness and connotes prestige and supremacy... the meticulous shooting of films and the diffusion of such marvelous pictures and magnificent images, targets the perpetuation of white models and values”⁷ (S. Azouz, 2008,

⁶ Bishop John, “*Morrison’s The Bluest Eye*”. *Explicator* 51.4 (1993): 252-255.

⁷ Samy Azouz, “*Cinema and ideology in The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison*”. Fall 2008. P6.

p.7). So, when black children watch television which promote white actresses as attractive and beautiful, they know the difference between Whites and Blacks. In addition, about Television, Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* makes references to a film "*Imitation of life*". At their first encounter, Maureen Peal mentions the film and asks Pecola about her name:

I just moved here. My name is Maureen Peal. What's yours?

"Pecola."

Pecola? Wasn't that the name of the girl in imitation of life?

I don't know. What is that?

The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother 'cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral. It was real sad. "Anyway, her name was Pecola too. She was so pretty. When it comes back, I'm going to see it again. My mother has seen it four times (TBE67-68).

Through this film, we clearly see the influence of white culture upon Blacks to such an extent that "Peola" hates her mother because she is Black. For her, the only way to be happy and be loved is to adopt white values, as a result Peola gives up her mother, quits home in order not to be contaminated by the ugliness of her mother. Through this film, Whites encourage Blacks to deny their cultural heritage.

1.2. Whiteness as Social and Cultural Currency

In *The Bluest Eye*, whiteness functions not only as an aesthetic ideal but also as a form of social and cultural currency, determining access to admiration, respect, and status within the Black community. Morrison illustrates that the privileging of white features and behaviors fosters



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hierarchies that operate even among those who are themselves marginalized. This system of valuation compounds the oppression Pecola experiences, revealing the insidious reach of racialized norms beyond overt racism. One of the clearest examples of this hierarchy is Maureen Peal, a light-skinned girl with green eyes and high -yellow features. Maureen's proximity to whiteness earns her admiration and inclusion, whereas Pecola, dark-skinned and economically disadvantaged, is stigmatized and ostracized. As the narrator says, "Maureen appeared to us like a fresh girl in the neighborhood, with the generosity of spirit that only a little money and slightly better features could bestow" (TBE 62). To such an extent that

The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me. Patent-leather shoes with buckles, a cheaper version of which we got only at Easter and which had disintegrated by the end of May. Fluffy sweaters the color of lemon drops tucked into skirts with pleats so orderly they astounded us. Brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff. There was a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk. She enchanted the entire school (TBE 62-63).

Maureen is privileged at school because of her skin color. Clearly, Maureen is privileged by the teachers at school "when they called on her, they smiled encouragingly", secondly "Black boys didn't trip her in the halls" and thirdly "black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet" (TBE 62). Just to say that, Black students know their limits in the American society. Face to Maureen, they are ugly because they do not captivate any attention

with their dark skin. Maureen is well-treated both by Blacks and Whites. Even “white boys didn’t stone her; white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners” (TBE 62). White students do not disturb Maureen because she is beautiful like them. As Mc Dermott and Samson outline that “Whiteness is associated with privilege” ⁸(Monica & Frank, 2013, p. 248). Her light skin gives her all the privilege at school and also in the American society.

Through the white imagery, black is ugly, dirty and uncivilized like Maureen Peal. She uses psychological violence to valorize her light skin by hurting black girls. Psychological violence can be described as a way of hurting someone’s emotions, feelings and sense of worth. She attacks verbally black girls by denigrating the black race because according to white ideology blackness is associated with ugliness. She says “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!” (TBE 73). In short, because of her light skin color, she feels herself superior to black girls so the point that “she never had to search for anybody to eat in the cafeteria” (63). This depiction demonstrates how the social currency of whiteness is not abstract but deeply material, shaping interpersonal relationships and social perception.

Morrison further illustrates the policing of this hierarchy through Geraldine, a middle-class black woman who embodies respectability politics. Geraldine isn’t really culturally white, though she practices whiteness, but is sort

⁸ Mc Dermott, Monica, and Frank Samson, “White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005):245-61. JSTOR. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.



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of racially black, though she tries not to be⁹ (D. Christopher, 2006, p.141). She is one of the black women who loves modern life by adopting western way of life:

These particular brown girls from Mobile and Aiken are not like some of their sisters...These sugar-brown Mobile girls move through the streets without a stir. They are as sweet and plain as butter-cake. Slim ankles; long, narrow feet. 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. They smell like wood, newspapers, and vanilla. They straighten their hair with Dixie Peach, and part it on the side (TBE 82).

In fact, Morrison starts her novel by Dick and Jane narrative. This narrative shows the ideal white family in a happy atmosphere by giving some details about them:

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 (TBE 1).

⁹ Douglass Christopher, "What *The Bluest Eye* Knows About Them: Culture, Race, and Identity." *American Literature* 78.1 (2006): 141-168.

This narrative is almost conforming to Geraldine's life. In one word, she has a husband, a son and a cat. She expresses a number of values namely "Order, precision, and consistency" and she is "clean and quiet" (TBE 86-87). Generally speaking, it turns out that white people love animals' company. It is the case of Geraldine who is a person who behaves as a white person by adopting white values. Geraldine's obsession with propriety and her rejection of what she deems the "nigger" category manifest in her contempt for Pecola "Get out.... you nasty little black bitch" (TBE 92). Geraldine's disdain is informed by internalized racialized and class-based ideologies; she measures worth in relation to whiteness and the associated symbols of status. This situation shows the influence of the white culture upon black and how they "subscribe to its ideologies"¹⁰ (R. Lister, 2009, p.25).

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother; exemplifies another dimension of whiteness as currency. Pauline's devotion to the white family she serves, coupled with her neglect and harsh treatment of Pecola, signals a hierarchy of emotional investment structured by racial valuation. As the narrator says "It was her good fortune to find a permanent job in the home of a well-to-do family whose members were affectionate, appreciative, and generous. She looked at their houses, smelled their linen, touched their silk draperies, and loved all of it. The child's pink nightie, the stacks of white pillow slips edged with embroidery, the sheets with top hems picked out with blue cornflowers. She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs (TBE 127). In fact, Pauline finds in white

¹⁰ Rachel Lister, *Reading Toni Morrison*, (Santa Barbara: California, Greenwood Press, 2009), p.25.



domestic space a sense of order and beauty denied to her own, and transfers this preference into emotional neglect of Pecola. By investing love and care selectively, Pauline enacts the cultural logic that elevates whiteness while devaluing blackness, reinforcing internalized hierarchies and alienation within the family.

The novel also highlights how this currency shapes peer dynamics. Light-skinned characters enjoy privileges that their darker-skinned counterparts cannot access, generating tension, jealousy and social stratification. Morrison's narrative exposes the pervasive influence of whiteness. It structures material, emotional and dictates who is included, admired or marginalized.

2. Alienation and the Fragmented Self

2.1 Internalization of White Ideology

The influence of white cultural values leads Blacks to reject their cultural heritage and tradition. According to Whites, Blackness is associated with ugliness while Whiteness with beauty. So, they internalize White ideology to such an extent that Blacks believe that they are ugly. This situation is seen in the corpus. For example, the Breedlove family truly believes that they are ugly. This is shown firstly when the narrator gives the reason why the Breedlove live in "an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty -Fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio" (TBE 33). It is an area in which "young boys met there to feel their groins, smoke cigarettes, and plan mild outrages" (TBE 33). In fact, "they stayed there because they believed they were ugly" (TBE 38). As the narrator states:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-wear, and they had each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement... "yes", they had said. "You are right" (TBE 39).

The above lines clearly expose that the master is white culture which elevates white features, denigrates black features and constantly reinforces Blacks' insignificance. Like beauty, ugliness is a social construction that fluctuates with both individual and cultural groups. The power that ugliness has over the Breedlove is due to their acceptance of it, the absence of the psychological wherewithal to construct their own aesthetic. Worthiness, then, comes from white acceptance, that requires as close an approximation to white middle-class American norms as possible¹¹. In other words, the Breedlove do not contradict Whites' opinion about their race and they accept their own ugliness without question.

In short, as a result of the internalization of their ugliness, Pauline Breedlove is the perfect illustration of this situation, to such an extent that she sees her new born daughter Pecola as ugly when she is at the hospital:

Anyways, the baby come. Big old healthy thing. She looked different from what I thought. Reckon I talked to it so much before I conjured up a mind's eye view of it... You knows who she is, but she don't look the same. They give her to me for a nursing, and she liked to pull my nipple off right away. She caught on fast.

¹¹ "Like an Eagle in the Air: Toni Morrison" in *The Bluest Eye*. Ed. By Harold Bloom, (Chelsea, House, Pub,2005), p.23



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Not like Sammy, he was the hardest child to feed. But Pecola look like she knowed right off what to do. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her....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 (TBE 125-126).

From these extracts, it goes without saying that the Breedlove are convinced that they are ugly simply because they have African features. As Mbalia opines: “

The African’s self-image is destroyed at an early age as a result of the ruling class’s (i.e. The European capitalist class) promotion of its own standard of beauty: Long, Stringy hair preferably blond; Keen nose, thin lips; and light eyes, preferably blue. By analogy, if the physical features of the European are accepted as the standard of beauty, then the African must be ugly¹² (Mbalia, 1991, p.556)

Alike Mbalia, Whites promote his own image as the only way to be accepted as a human being in American society. As Belaid Imane outlines “the White society’s plan is to deconstruct the black family bonding, to indoctrinate each member about absolute beauty by enforcing in them the belief of ugliness which they accept with conviction”¹³ (Belaid, 2017, p.35) as in Breedlove’ case. In fact, convinced of her ugliness, Pauline Breedlove goes in search of

¹² Mbalia, “The need for Racial Approbation”: A dialogue in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. *International Journal of Research*,2(6), 1991, p. 556-560

¹³ Belaide, “Beauty as a cultural Aspect in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”. 2017

happiness and beauty in white family. She gives up her own family and takes refuge in the soft beauty home of the Fishers family in which Pauline works as a maid.

Moreover, Pauline works with love for this white family. In fact, in the Fishers home, all things are beautiful contrary to Pauline's house. When she bathes the little Fisher girl "it was in a porcelain tub with silvery taps running infinite quantities of hot, clear water. She dried her in fluffy white towels and put her in cuddly night clothes and then she brushed the yellow hair, enjoying the roll and slip of it between her fingers" (TBE 127). This comfort in which she bathes the white girl is different from when she bathes her children. The material well-being is different from hers, because in the Fishers there is "no zinc, no buckets of stove-heated water, no flaky, stiff, grayish towels washed in a kitchen sink, dried in a dusty backyard, no tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb" (TBE 127). Pauline feels at ease when she is in the Fishers home to such an extent that in order to attain the white values accepts to work in White family and neglects her own house, her children and her man because for her "they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the earl-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate and more lovely" (TBE 127).

Secondly, like her mother, the protagonist Pecola Breedlove believes that she is ugly, because she has "support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie and every glance" (TBE 39), to such an extent that she tries to discover the source of her ugliness:

Long hours, she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers



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and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk...her teachers had always treated her this way...she also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!” and never fail to get of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused (TBE 45-46).

Indeed, this above quotation shows Pecola’s thoughts about her race. She believes that it is because she is black that nobody loves her. As a result of this situation, she knows that it is her dark-skin which makes her ugly and she believes in it. Pecola does not miss the opportunity to drink in Shirley Temple cup with white image in order to be like white child actress. She rejects herself and wears the image of Mary Jane, because for Pecola “eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane and Be Mary Jane” (TBE 50). For Pecola, she is so ugly that she wants to be “Mary Jane” who is a white girl with beautiful eyes.

Thirdly, like The Breedlove, certain parents internalize white ideology which stipulates that whiteness is associated with beauty and blackness with ugliness. This is justifiable by Claudia’s remarks when she destroys Whites doll. In fact, she notices that even if she destroys the dolls, she cannot change adults’ perception of beauty because of the internalization of this ideology “Dolls we 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 our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world” (TBE 76).

2.2 Identity Crisis

Pecola Breedlove's tragic trajectory in *The Bluest Eye* culminates in a profound psychological collapse, illustrating the devastating consequences of internalized oppression and the alienating effects of a society that equates whiteness with worth. The novel's narrative emphasizes Pecola's isolation from an early age. Her family environment is characterized by neglect. Pauline Breedlove, preoccupied with the white family she serves; leaving Pecola to navigate a world where her existence is rendered invisible. As the narrator says, "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" (TBE 205). Pecola becomes a repository for the shame, fear and desire of her community; a living emblem of collective alienation.

Having been treated badly by most people surrounding her, Pecola yearns to have blue eyes in the hope that people will love her. Her obsession with acquiring "blue eyes" is not merely a childish fantasy, it is a profound expression of racial alienation. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a theoretical framework that illuminates Pecola's psychic condition: "The Black man is not a man...The Black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon, 1952). In fact, according to white ideology, whiteness is characterized by the perfect beauty, richness, order and cleanliness while blackness is associated with ugliness, poverty, disorder and dirtiness, Pecola wants to have a new identity by rejecting her black cultural heritage. In other words, she internalizes white ideology, hence her obsession for white beauty to escape her ugliness. This situation leads inevitably the protagonist Pecola into self-esteem.



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As mentioned by Freud, the subject's psychological world is shattered and later re-created in imagery, unreal fantasy in the first phase of psychosis¹⁴ (S. Freud, 1915, p.142). This is the same thing in Pecola' life as she makes an effort to destroy her identity as a black subject, and then poses an obsessive attempt to obtain blue eyes. As hooks opines "as long as black folks are taught that the only way we can gain any degree of economic self-sufficiency or be materially privileged is by first rejecting blackness, our history and culture, then there will always be a crisis in black identity"¹⁵. Pecola undergoes an identity crisis because at school, she learns to associate blue eyes with beauty, love, purity and acceptance. In fact, according to her if she has blue eyes, she would see all things around her beautiful. She dislikes herself so much that she started fantasizing, dreaming and praying that she has a pretty blue eyed whom her parents would love:

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 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

¹⁴ Freud Sigmund, "The Unconscious". The Essentials of psychoanalysis, p.142

¹⁵ Hooks Bell, Black Looks: Race and Representation. Boston: South End Press, 1992

mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes
(TBE 46).

Clearly, this quotation above may suggest that Pecola demands a new identity. Affected by the influence of the image of whiteness, Pecola finds a way she thinks it is reasonable to solve all problems she faces. People would love her if she has blue eyes, the eyes which is loved by everyone. Pecola is contempt by the people around her. Hence, she dreams of the "bluest eye", and rejects her identity to obtain a false identity. Pecola's situation is similar to the stage Freud named, "Second phase" of having false identity. She internalizes the standard of white beauty "Thrown, in this way, into binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (TBE 47). She wants blue eyes in order to be seen and accepted in the society. As Wei argues "the culture of mass culture—the dominant culture increasingly invades the black people's lives. Living under the influence of white culture, the black people are forced to change or accept the value of dominant culture in order to gain identification from others; they have to give up the identity as a black people. This blind admiration of dominant culture can be viewed as oppression"¹⁶ (W. Wong, 2011, p.3).

As a matter of fact, Pecola is a victim of this blind admiration because she wants to be White by having blue eyes, so she denies her race. This obsession of beauty (in order to be loved) leads Pecola to be devoted in her request of beauty (blue eyes) to such an extent that she wants a miracle from God (her only hope) reason why "Each night,

¹⁶ Wei Wong, "A Mad Girl: The oppression of Beauty in The Bluest Eye".
2011



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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 (TBE 46-47). In short, through Pecola's desire, Morrison draws our attention on the realities of black's life, the painful and sorrowful situation to be Black in white America during the 1940s. For Pecola, the fact of having blue eyes, it is the only way to be loved, accepted as a human being so she reclaims white identity portray in media. As Baode declares "The Anglo-Saxon concept of beauty was forcefully thrust upon the black race as a necessary requirement for survival in America. White color had to be; and should be, the only criterion for survival, success and happy co-existence in America"¹⁷ (Baode, 1998, p.84). In other words, to be considered as a human being you must be White. Baode asserts that "being white in color implied a whole series of connotations: of being attractive- both physically and culturally desirable, intelligent and reasonable, and above all, worthy of love. Blackness was seen as a negative sign, a symbol of ugliness, uncontrolled, irrational behavior, and violent sexuality and so on"¹⁸. It is this ugliness that Pecola wants to escape in order to attain the white values. Moreover, this obsession of blue eyes participates to the downfall of Pecola because of her devotion to have white features. Pecola dislikes herself so that she is ready for all in order to obtain blue eyes. She goes to Soaphead church, a

¹⁷ Baode R, "American Society as Reflected in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye". New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998. P 84-94

¹⁸ Idem.p51

“Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams” (TBE 165) to make her eyes blue:

What can I do for you my child?

Maybe, maybe you can do it for!

Do what for you?

I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.

Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened.

My eyes.

What about your eyes?

I want them blue. (TBE 173-174).

By analyzing this dialogue, it seems easier to pinpoint that Pecola suffers too much from the complex of inferiority. This obsession to have blue eyes, in order to be loved by people demonstrates her strong desire to belong to white race. In fact, Soaphead asks her to do something so that God will answer her wishes to have blue eyes. He says “Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one (TBE 175). She picks up the packet, the odor of the dark, sticky meat makes her want to vomit. She puts a hand on her stomach. He encourages her by saying that “Courage. Courage, my child. These things are not granted to faint heart (TBE 175). After doing that, Pecola has not blue eyes, she succumbs to the foolish. In short, Pecola is ready for all to obtain blue eyes in order to be appreciated both in the black and white community. Pecola's internalization of white beauty ideals compounds her isolation. Convinced that blue eyes will transform her life, she retreats into fantasy, engaging with an imaginary companion that validates her delusion “I will stay with my



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blue eyes and sit in the grass” (TBE 204). This act signals the fragmentation of her subjectivity. As a matter of fact, Pecola is alienated not only from her family and community but also from her own body and self-perception.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* offers a deep examination of how Eurocentric beauty standards, the privileging of whiteness, and social complicity intersect to fracture Black identity. Through the experiences of Pecola Breedlove, Morrison illustrates how these cultural norms are not merely aesthetic ideals but instruments of oppression with profound psychological, familial, and communal consequences. Pecola’s tragic exemplifies the internalization of white supremacy. The research questions guiding this study provide a framework for understanding Morrison’s layered critique. First, the novel portrays Eurocentric beauty standards as a mechanism of oppression, shaping self-perception and dictating who is deemed worthy of love and attention. Second, Morrison demonstrates that whiteness functions as a form of social and cultural currency, structuring interpersonal hierarchies and influencing how individuals interact within their communities. Third, the novel illuminates how internalization of these ideals produces alienation and fragmentation of identity as exemplified by Pecola’s psychological collapse and the community’s role in perpetuating her suffering. Morrison’s narrative also engages with theoretical insights from Frantz Fanon and Sigmund Freud. Fanon’s work on internalized

racism clarifies the psychological mechanisms underlying Pecola's desire for blue eyes. Freud's analysis of the false identity elucidates the alienation of Pecola Breedlove. Finally, Morrison's work retains striking contemporary relevance. In a society where colorism, media representation, and Eurocentric beauty continue to shape perceptions of Black identity, *The Bluest Eye* remains a critical intervention. Pecola's tragedy serves as a cautionary tale, warning of the dangers of internalized oppression.

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