Tribhuwan University

Loss of Childhood Innocence in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that Kamal Bhusal has prepared this thesis entitled "Loss of Childhood Innocence in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" under my guidance and supervision. I, therefore, forward it to the research committee of Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara for examination.

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This thesis entitled "Loss of Childhood Innocence in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*"

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CHAPTER- I

The Bluest Eye: An Epitome of Racism

Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye,* presents the lives of several impoverished black families in the 1940s in a rather unconventional and painful manner. Morrison leads the reader through the lives of selected children and adults, describing a few powerful incidents, thoughts and experiences that lend insight into the motivation and behavior of these characters.

The Bluest Eye is a simple story about a lonely black girl, Pecola Breedlove, daughter of black parents Cholly and Pauline. Pecola is eleven-year old when she knows the huge chasm about racism. Pecola, unloved by her own parents, rejected by her own classmates and teacher, finally knows that racism is the cause of her rejection. When her father burns the house, sets his family members outside of it and is sent to jail, her own mother rejects her, and then this helpless child is sheltered by another family called MacTeer. The half of the story about Pecola is narrated by both MacTeer sisters, Claudia and Frieda. When Pecola knows what it feels like to be a black girl, she longs for blue eyes which, in her view, are the ultimate symbol of whiteness and the key to acceptance and love from those around her, and it drives her into madness. Pecola's progressive insanity is charted through her relationships with other members of the black community whose sense of individual and communal identity has, in varying ways and degree, become distorted by the internalization of white cultural values. Later, the girl, who does not know the difference between the black and the white, knows about the big chasm of racial difference. This sort of racial discrimination compels Pecola to aspire for the bluest eye hoping that it will bring love and affection to her.

The Bluest Eye was published in 1970 which was a critical period in the history of American Civil Rights Movements. Morrison began Pecola's story as a

short piece in 1962, it became a novel-in-progress by 1965. It was written during the years of the most dynamic and turbulent transformations of Afro-American life. One of those transformations was a new recognition of Black-American Beauty. After centuries, Black-Americans began to argue for a new standard of beauty. This new standard was meant to be racially inclusive, allowing blacks to see black as beautiful, but the need to argue for this new standard reveals how firmly the white standard of beauty was entrenched. But before this kind of conceptualization, the black people regarded themselves as the culturally inferior and racially segregated which is very eloquently dramatized in the novel through the portrayal of the different characters like Pecola and her parents, Cholly and Pauline.

The Bluest Eye was the foundation-stone in Morrison's writing career. With the publication of the novel, literary reviews for and against it came in abundance. As Morrison succeeded in publishing novels one after the other, critics gradually failed to oppose its racial theme and its exposition of race problems in America. Critics have analyzed *The Bluest Eye* from different perspectives.

One of the impressive qualities of literature is its ability to excite imagination of readers with the help of the textual medium by vivid depiction of events and by finding a way to make readers feel with the characters of the books and stories as if reliving their experiences. And if the theme of a book is sad, or outright tragic, a masterful writer can achieve an especially strong effect on the audience in to draw our attention to certain problems that surround us. In this connection, the theme of racism, hatred, and violence in our society belongs to the list of those often tragic, and Toni Morrison (born in 1931) in her novel *The Bluest Eye* uncovers exactly such sad aspects of the racial problems in the American society.

The writer, who was the first African-American women to receive the Nobel

Prize in literature is capable of an insightful analysis of the chosen theme, is clear from the fact that, as Morrison herself suggests in the afterword, *The Bluest Eye* is to a certain degree an autobiographical account, if not in the specific details of the novel characters' experiences, but in the general familiarity of the author with the difficulties of the time described in the book (the narrator of the story - a nine-year-old girl Claudia - is of the same age as Morrison was in 1941 when the events took place, and lives in the town where Morrison grew). Now, with these observations in mind, we should not be surprised that there are numerous motives and symbolic elements in Morrison's novel. Still, perhaps one of the most important of such motives is the general theme of the loss of innocence, which in the book may be applied to the protagonist of story - a black girl of eleven years old - but which from the larger point of view is characteristic of the whole issue of racism and its social consequences.

Most of the characters in the novel are isolated and fragmented within themselves, culturally and racially. Characters in the black community accept their status as the other, which has been imposed upon them by the white community. In turn, blacks assign the status of other to individuals like Pecola within the black community. Morrison's entire characters exist in a world defined by its blackness and by the white society which both violates and denies it. The destructive effect of the white society can take the form of outright physical violence, but oppression in Morrison's world is more often psychic violence, which ultimately makes the characters suffer. Pecola is the epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to object and then makes them feel inferior as objects. In this world, light-skinned women can feel superior to dark ones, married women to whores, and so on. Pecola, thus, is so far outside the centre of the system excluded from reality by race, gender, class, age, and personal history that she goes mad, fantasizing that her eyes have

turned blue and so fitted her for the world. But not all outsiders go mad or otherwise surrender.

The characters in *The Bluest Eye* are lonesome in themselves because of the terrible consequences of blacks' internalizing the value of the white culture that both directly and indirectly reject them. Pecola aspires for the bluest eyes which she considers as one of the characteristics of white people. She tries to internalize the values of a white culture that brings terrible consequences. Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, is impressed by the white norms of 1940s. She has largely assimilated herself into the white society. Her values, habits, and possessions signal a cultural membership that her race undercuts. By rejecting the beauty of her daughter after delivery, Pauline proves herself as the blind follower of the supremacy of the dominant race. She rejects her baby simply because she does not possess the color of the dominant race. In spite of being as a black woman Pauline internalizes the value and the culture of the white. She cannot overcome it and suffers.

Cholly, Pecola's father, is not an exception; he cannot deny that he has internalized the values and the customs of the superior white class. His indifference towards his home, family and even himself slowly drives him to the state of suffering. His regular habit of being intoxicated and the regular quarrel with his wife disrupts the whole family life. A powerful incident in his young age, his first sexual experience with Darlene, gives insight into the rage, confusion and tenderness he feels towards women in his adult life. The narrator describes the incident with Darlene and the white men through Cholly's eyes.

Toni Morrison was a precocious reader as a child. Working out of her memory of what Lorain, Ohio, had been like in 1940 (flourishing time of Harlem Renaissance), she constructed her own childhood, placed in centre stages are three

little girls: the book's narrator, nine years old Claudia MacTeer, her sister Frieda, ten; and their friend Pecola Breedlove, eleven. In centering the story on an ordinary girl who is taught by her colorist culture that she is ugly, Toni Morrison portrays the cruel ground which forecloses Pecola's longing to be loved. The passage from the school primer which opens *The Bluest Eye* represents the all white world of children's books which the novel challenges. The far-reaching effects of silence in society are introduced before the story even begins with Morrison's use of the Dick and Jane primer passage. The passage is repeated three times, successively deteriorating. With each repetition, it loses standard conventions, such as punctuation, spacing, and capitalization.

The deteriorating passage reflects Pecola's mental state. Finding nothing in society that allows her space to be herself, as the Dick and Jane stories also do not, she begins to break down conventions of meaning. The schoolbook reflects social standards and how society is educating children to view white stereotypes as right. Dick and Jane portray a very narrow stereotype of the American family, one with which many children will not identify. Nowhere are there examples to which they can relate. If they do not fit the prescribed standards of what is right, they are left to believe they are wrong. The little MacTeer sisters, who tell Pecola's story, raise their voices in defense of what is black.

The Bluest Eye has perhaps the least controlled plot of Morrison's novels. Because she chose to portray the ill effects on children of internalized racism, Morrison needed a child protagonist. However, she could not maintain the focus on Pecola Breedlove throughout the entire novel without demonizing Pecola's antagonists. Therefore, she needed to break the narrative unity of the novel to move from Pecola's story to her parents' stories and the stories of other adults and children

who influence her life. The novel then is plotted as a series of character sketches.

Each of these sketches traces a tragic fall. The story of Pecola, the wounded little girl who wishes to solve her problems by gaining the racial mark of whiteness, blue eyes, begins in the innocence of that wish and ends tragically in her insanity, a playing out of that wish. Cholly also begins in innocence. An abandoned child who nevertheless loves the only mother and father figures he has available, but finds them to abandon him too, one by dying and the other by his drinking. Cholly's hurts as a child are compounded by his hurts as an African-American living in a racist society. His initiation into adult sexuality is perverted by two white men who want to have sexual pleasure at his and his lover's expense. The story of Pauline also begins in innocence. As a girl, Pauline wanted someone to love her and after finding someone who would, she was ruined in her thinking by the Hollywood images of beauty and romantic love. She ended up living the constricted morality of respectability, loving her white employers and hating her own family.

Pauline and Cholly both emotionally abandon their children. They are so emotionally compromised by the time they become parents, they cannot provide nurturance to their children. Cholly is further removed from family even than Pauline. His multiple abandonments led him to cut himself loose from all social obligations. He ends up degraded, regularly beating his wife, ultimately raping his daughter, and finally abandoning his own family to die in a work house. Hence, the stories of these three characters are plotted along the tragic line. Each begins in innocence and beauty of spirit and ends hurt beyond repair by their society.

Literature Review

After the publication, *The Bluest Eye* received a wide range of acclamations. Toni Morrison's novels have attracted popular and critical attention for their inventive

blend of realism and fantasy, social analysis and passionate philosophical concerns. Cynthia A. Davis says:

> The constant censorship of and intrusion on black life from the surrounding society is emphasized not by specific events so much as by a consistent pattern of misnaming. Power for Morrison is largely the power to name, to define reality and perception […].*The Bluest Eye* [1970], for example, opens with a primer description of a typical American family:" 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". Portions of that description reappear as chapter headings for the story of black lives; all removed in various degrees form the text book reality. (324)

The combination of social observation with broadening and allusive commentary gives her fictions the symbolic quality of myth, and in fact the search for a myth adequate to experience is one of Morrison's central themes. Because her world and characters are inescapably involved with problems of perception, definition, and meaning, they direct attention to Morrison's own ordering view and its implications.

Morrison's early works explore the results for black women when the values are real and powerful but are designed primarily for middle class whites. This concept certainly appears importantly in *Song of Solomon*, but that book also explores what happens to women whose values are determined by the men who control their lives. From the outset, these values are known by some of Morrison's female characters to be useless, even damaging, to them. Claudia, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, recognizes her position. In this regard Jane S. Bakerman examines how female characters fail in Morrison's first three novels when they try to acquire beauty

and love. In their search for love as for valid sexual encounter to be worthy in the society, female characters in Morrison's novels never meet their desire.

Bakerman opines that the author in the novel joins her basic theme with the initiation motif and initiation experiences. Bakerman states:

> *The Bluest Eye* employs two frames; the outer frame demonstrates the elementary school reader standards for family behavior and beauty. The inner frame is the family life of the MacTeer; the younger MacTeer daughter, Claudia, tells us the story of her friend, Pecola Breedlove, and in doing so describes her own stable family as a point of comparison and contrast. (543)

Pecola seems to have been growing up knowing that the Breedloves were damaged people, undervalued by both whites and blacks. She wishes to emerge not only from the isolation of childhood, but also from the isolation of the family stigma: They are poor, and they are ugly. In *The Bluest Eye,* we find female characters longing for love, for valid sexual encounters, and, above all, for a sense that they are worthy.

Morrison's first four books, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby* constitute Morrison's struggle with colonization, both for her characters and their communities, as well as in her own writing. We can see this pattern in the dialogical way in which Morrison frames her early novels: *The Bluest Eye* is framed with the Dick and Jane children's book; *Sula* with the Bible and *Song of Solomon* with the American capitalist success myth. To scrutinize this issue of colonialism, Malin Walther Pereira states:

> One of the many thematic concerns that can be clarified by a periodization of Morrison's work based on her struggle with colonization is her treatment of beauty throughout her work. In the novels before *Tar Baby* Morrison repeatedly depicts black female

> characters engulfed by white ideals of beauty. In *The Bluest Eye,* Pecola's desire for blue eyes reflects a community by white ideas of what is beautiful. (74)

During the Black Arts Movement, writers delineated the impact of the cultural colonization of the black community by Euro-American culture and values and actively pursued a black aesthetic. Using a decolonization framework for periodizing Morrison's work, thus, embraces both her recurring concerns as well as the literary origins during the Black Arts Period.

A characteristic of Morrison's published novels has been her depiction of male and female protagonists failing or succeeding on the difficult journey to freedom through self-awareness. In this regard, Patrice Cormier-Hamilton states:

> Morrison's steadfast concentration on the importance of the past indicates that for her, self-realization for African Americans can only be achieved through an active acknowledgement of one's cultural past. Only by understanding and accepting the past can African Americans achieve a psychological wholeness in the present and strengthen their power as a race in the future. (111)

Morrison's protagonists face a world that is more complex, oppressive, and destructive. They battle against intra-racism and inter-racism as well as poverty and sexism. Her works do exhibit naturalistic tendencies and she presents them in a new way, illustrating different challenges specific to minorities and offering alternate ways of dealing with these challenges.

Thomas H. Fick studies *The Bluest Eye* as primarily represented by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Plato's "Allegory of the cave" in Book 7th of *The Republic.* These two important moments in Western culture provide specific thematic and structural

elements in the novel; in a larger sense they suggest Morrison's belief in the close relationship between intellectual traditions and particular economic and social conditions. So he states; "*The Bluest Eye* is framed by the narrator's brooding recollection of a *Wasteland*, and the seasons which title the major sections-'Autumn', 'Winter', 'Spring', and 'Summer'-mark off a parody of rebirth and growth"(10). In the thin light of spring, Pecola Breedlove is raped by her drunken father (a cruel sort of breeding indeed), and in summer, pregnant, she goes mad in the winter after the equivalent of Eliot's Madame Sosostris works a phony spell to give her blue eyes.

Likewise, Cat Moses studies *The Bluest Eye* as the genesis of Morrison's effort to do what the music did for blacks, what we used to be able to do with each other in private and in that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization. She states:

> The catharsis and the transmission of cultural knowledge and values that have always been central to the blues form the thematic and rhetorical underpinnings of *The Bluest Eye*. The narrative's structure follows a pattern common to traditional blues lyrics: a movement from an initial emphasis on loss to a concluding suggestion of resolution of grief through motion. (623)

In this way, *The Bluest Eye* contains an abundance of cultural wisdom. The blue lyrics that punctuate the narrative at critical points suggest a system of folk knowledge and values that is crucial to a young black woman's survival in the 1930s and '40s and which supports Claudia's cathartic role as storyteller.

L.E. Sissman acknowledges that Morrison has taken the subject matter generally rejected by the writers and treated characters to whom no ultimate glory is possible. Sissman remarks, " Morrison writes affectingly and often in the freshest,

simplest and most striking prose, of young Frieda and Claudia MacTeer and their friend Pecola, who is growing Lorain in 1941"(4). The same critic further adds that Morrison gives us a fresh, close look at the lives of terror and decorum of those Negros who want to get on in a white *Uncle Toms* (4-5). Despite all these believable striking facts of Morrison's writing, Sissman also does not find the story flawless:

> *The Bluest Eye* is not flawless; Miss Morrison's touching and disturbing picture of the doomed youth of her race is marred by an occasional error of fact of judgment. She places the story in a frame of the bland white words of a conventional school reader –surely an unnecessary and unsubtle irony. (5)

The novel is somewhat disfigured by the error of judgment. It is framed in the perspective of a conservative reader. It presents the hopelessness of blacks due to the over-domination of the white race.

Roberta Rubenstein studies Morrison's first four novels in the light of cultural discrepancy with reference to the characters' psyche, gender, and cultural dehumanization. The personality of each character is split because of the terrible result of racism and cultural oppression. In the domination of black culture by the whites, each character observes her/his own stature through the white spectacles. They feel that they lack something to secure the place for a happy and luxurious life in the society. Roberta Rubenstein opines, "The recurrent imagery of deformity and mutilation visually represents the injurious effects of oppression and marginalization, whether resulting from gender, ethnic minority identity, economic circumstances, or their cumulative consequences" (141). The alienation of the blacks is the effect of domination by the whites regarding their race and culture. The blacks are fragmented due to racism and cultural differences.

Allen Alexander studies the novel as the religious references, both from Western and African sources, abound in Toni Morrison's fiction, but nowhere are they more intriguing or perplexing than in *The Bluest Eye*:

> In Morrison's fictional world, God's characteristics are not limited to those represented by the traditional Western notion of the Trinity: Father, son and Holy Ghost. Instead, God possesses a fourth face, one that is an explanation for all those things-the existence of evil, the suffering of the innocent and just-that seem so inexplicable in the face of a religious tradition that preaches the omnipotence of a benevolent God in *The Bluest Eye*. (293)

Though Morrison's model of God owes much to African tradition, a major part of her portrait is dedicated to exposing how traditional Western notions about God affect her characters. If *The Bluest Eye* can in any way be characterized as an initiation story, then a major portion of a character's initiation involves discovering the inadequacy of Western theological models of those who have been marginalized by the dominant white culture.

Among the critics who have studied the novel thematically in association to cultural context Barbara Christina is worth quoting. Pecola's story is not only her own but also a representation of past three hundred-years' context. The author makes Pecola's story relevant to history that encompasses the interface between black and white cultures. In *The Bluest Eye*, the story presents tragic complexities of a desire of Pecola for blue eyes that symbolize beauty and therefore goodness and happiness. It is the conflict between the distinct norms of two cultures:

> This simple theme, the desire of a black girl for blue eyes is a real and symbolic statement about the conflict between the good and the

> beautiful of two cultures and how it affects the psyche of the people within those cultures. The theme is the base of the conflict of artistic and social values between the Anglo-American and Afro-American cultures, complicated by the psycho political dominance of one culture over another. As such, this novel is a book about mythic, political and cultural mutilation as much as it is a book about race and self-hatred. (60)

This story is not merely the story of a single person, but a representation of past couple of decades' context. The novel clearly exhibits the disfigurement created by the racism and the psychological effect created by it to the black people. Due to this deformity, there had always been the domination of whites over the blacks. And this conflict of race had further created a sense of self-hatred among the black people.

CHAPTER-II

Race and Black Literature

Black Literature

Black literature, also called African American literature, is the literary work created by Americans of African descent or literary work written about the African American experience. Black literature reflects the development and history of the United States through the eyes and perspectives of African Americans. The term Black literature covers a wide range of works, from slave narratives of the nineteenth century to contemporary literature. Black literature is generally traced back to the late eighteenth century. Two hundred years later, the field of Black literature has evolved to the point where there is no questioning about its role in American history and culture.

Certain themes are prevalent in Black literature; the slave experience is examined in many of the best known works in this field. The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin (1930)*, which was written by a white woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, is often regarded as a landmark work in Black literature because it has so profoundly affected race relations in America.

Many great works of Black literature focus on the Black experience, and depict race relations in certain times and places. For example, Mildred D. Taylor's 1976 novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, describes one tight-knit family's experience in Mississippi in the 1930s. Another major work of Black literature, published in 1937, is Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, which is set in Florida at the beginning of the Twentieth century. Written in dialect, *Their Eyes were Watching God*, was controversial in its day, but was rediscovered in the 1970s and deemed a classic.

Black literature is often divided by era. These divisions serve not only to describe the periods from which the works come, but can also be used as shorthand to describe the cultural perspectives from which the works come. The slave narratives of the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries describe the movement of Blacks from Africa to their new positions in the United States. After the Civil War, when the slaves were emancipated, begins the post-slavery era, noteworthy in literary terms for non-fiction works by W.E.B. Dubois and poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was the first movement in Black literature that appealed to an audience wider than the Black community of its time, and works from this period remain very popular today.

The civil rights era of the 1950s-1960s was another period of expansion for Black literature. Gwendolyn Brooks became the first Black person to win a Pulitzer Prize with her book of poems *Annie Allen.* Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison won wide acclaim for their novels, which addressed cultural and political realities, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. composed his sermons and speeches, which are familiar to most Americans today. Novelists, playwrights, and poets of this era paved the road for the movement that would come in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, when Black literature became mainstream material that is part of American culture at large.

Black literature did not start all of a sudden; the way for black literature was paved by the poet and novelist Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and the novelist Charles Waddell Chestnut. And in the years that immediately followed a sizeable number of Negro critics and scholars (W.E.B. Dubois, Benjamin Brawley), as well as numerous minor poets (Fenton Johnson, Georgia Douglas, Alice Dunbar-Nelson), were steadily active.

Harlem Renaissance

The sudden emergence of an immense number of gifted black writers appeared to augur the inception of a Third Force on the American literary scene, and since- by reason of its closeness to the nerve of the country's cultural ferment and the hospitality if offered radical movements in Negro life- New York city's Harlem was for this generation of Negro intellectuals a kind of Mecca (literary place of the Blacks) towards which they gravitated in spite of not as actual residents, the movement has long been spoken of as Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen and Sterling Brown, Negro Americans of this century first encountered a large expression in lyric form of their ancestral memories and the strange, bitter exactions which their fated involvement in the American reality entailed. Amongst those writers, Langston Hughes had the longest productive career.

Langston Hughes stands as a literary and cultural translation of the political resistance and campaign of black consciousness leaders such as Martin Luther King to restore the rights of the black citizenry thus fulfilling the ethos of the American dream, which is celebrated universally every year around February to April. By 1924, his poetry which he had all along been working on showed the powerful influence of the blues and jazz. His poem "The Weary Blues" which best exemplifies this influence helped launch his career when it won first prize in the poetry section of the 1925 literary contest of Opportunity magazine and also won another literary prize in Crisis.

Hughes expressed his determination to write fearlessly, shamelessly and unrepentantly about low-class black life and people in spite of opposition to that. He also exercised much freedom in experimenting with blues as well as jazz. According Arnold Rampersad:

> Much of his work celebrated the beauty and dignity and humanity of black Americans. Unlike other writers Hughes basked in the glow of the obviously high regard of his primary audience, African Americans. His poetry, with its original jazz and blues influence and its powerful democratic commitment, is almost certainly the most influential written by any person of African descent in this century. (36)

Richard Wright came up with *Native Son,* which was a turning point as it brought forth the bleeding hearts of the Blacks. This book brings forth the story of a black man who accidentally kills the mother of his girlfriend who is white; then he asserts his identity after this murder. In this book also, the powerful theme of segregation, violation, discrimination, and the oppression of the black by the white is apparently portrayed. The theme of protest and the powerful indictment of the story of being black is not only expressed in Richard Wright's *Native Son* but also his another book *Uncle Tom's Children*, where the husband of a Negro woman has been seduced by a white salesman.

Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* came on the scene after the publication of Richard Wright's books. Here, Ellison uses an interesting metaphor to show how Blacks are invisible in American society. It is a protest novel that howls, rages and hoots against the mainstream culture and the American biased system. Through the novel, Ellison skillfully conveys the Black experience.

Another movement followed by the Harlem Renaissance was Black Arts Movement. Through the movement, again the prominent and the powerful Afro-American writers expressed their rages, anger, dissatisfaction and the cruelty and the brutalization towards the Blacks by the white society. Larry Neal states:

> The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the

> artist that alienates him from his community. Black Arts is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black power concept…an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America…Black Arts Movement proposes a radical recording of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology. (75)

Black Arts Movement designates a number of African-American writers whose work was shaped by the social and political turbulence of the 1960s, the decade of massive protest against the Vietnam War, militant demands for the rights of Black that led to repeated and sometimes violent confrontations. The literary movement was associated with the Black power movement in politics, whose spokesmen oppose the proponents of integration and assimilation, and instead advocated black separatism, black pride and black solidarity. The other prominent writers who followed Larry Neal are Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin and John Oliver.

CHAPTER-III

Racism: its Impact and Consequences in *The Bluest Eye*

Racism is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. Racial separatism is the belief, most of the time based on racism that different races should remain segregated and apart from each another.

Racism has existed throughout human history. It may be defined as the hatred of one person towards another or the belief that a person is less than a human, because of his/her skin color, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person. It has influenced wars, slavery, the formation of nations, and legal codes. During the past a thousand of years, racism on the part of western powers toward non-westerns has had a far more significant impact on history than any other form of racism (such as racism among western groups or among Easterners, such as Asians, Africans, and others). The most notorious example of such racism by the West has been slavery, particularly the enslavement of Africans in the New World. This enslavement was accomplished because of the racist belief that Black Africans were less fully human than white Europeans and their descendants. Talking about the impact of racism on mankind, Brace says, "Race has been a cause of more misunderstanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in a language" (116).

In the Old Testament people's distinctiveness is established not in appearance and custom but in relationship to God. The descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, became the people of Israel who take the name of Israel and the people are his descendants. Thus, the distinctiveness is defined by God not in terms of appearance and custom. God is a sole power who divides and names people. There is

a little hint that early Jewish writers developed any theories about the relative importance of biological and the cultural inheritances by which God made those people distinct. This theocentric notion rarely applies in understanding "new racism".

Ancient Greeks and Hebrews distinguished themselves from "other" in terms of appearance, customs, and language or theocentrism. A group of people having common epithets and some sort of association forms a distinctive human culture. In the 5th century B.C. in Greece, Hypocrites sought "to explain the (supposed) superiority of his own people of (Western Asia) by arguing that the barren soils of Greece had forced the Greeks to become tougher and more independent" (Appiah 275). In the Hellenic world in Greece both the black "Ethiopians" to the south and blond "Scythians" to the north were viewed as inferior to the Hellens. However, Homer in the *Iliad* and pre-Socratic sophists in their works clarified that the inferiority was not incorrigible. They defined racial characteristics as independent feature not as color.

America has had a long history of racism. Racism has infiltrated every aspect of American society and shows no sign of decreasing. This fact is more easily understood if racism is viewed for what it really is at its core: an institutional ideology. It is the belief that one group of people with a particular biological make up is superior to other groups with the differing biological make up. Thus, these groups deemed superior are allowed to gain economic power and social dominance over the other groups considered inferior. This condition is all the more exasperating in America because of the many strides that have been made over the past decades to combat the situation.

In this context Barbera J. Fields argues:

> An outcome favorable to the black and white common people is, in

> short, might-have-been that probably could not have been. Even so, we may well pause for a moment to consider why not. To do so is to remind ourselves that the "race problem" took its form, not from discrete attitudes, but from the circumstances under which ordinary people had to make their choices. (145)

It is apparent that racist practices directed against black, brown, yellow, and red people have been an integral element of the U.S. history, including present day American culture and society. This means not simply that Americans have inherited racist attitudes and prejudices, but, more importantly, that institutional forms of racism are embedded in American society in both visible and invisible ways. These institutional forms exist not only in remnants of de jure job but also housing, and educational discrimination and political gerrymandering.

In this regard, Evan P. Apfelbaum states:

> One strategy practiced by many whites to regulate the appearance of prejudice during social interaction is to avoid talking about race, or even acknowledging racial differences. Whites' acknowledgement of race was highly susceptible to normative pressure and most evident among individuals concerned with self-presentational aspects of appearing biased. (928)

In the history of America, when some of the Africans were brought into America then the most devastating social practice started. In this regard Frantz Fanon argues, "In the white world, the man (sic) of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema, because superimposed upon the corporal schema is a historical-racial schema fabricated out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (110). African Americans or Black Americans are citizens or residents of the United States who have

origins in any of the black populations of Africa.

In the United States, the term is generally used for Americans with at least partial sub-Saharan African ancestry. Most African Americans are the descendants of captive Africans who survived the slavery era within the boundaries of the present United States, although some are voluntary immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, or elsewhere. African Americans make up the single largest racial minority in the United States.

In the beginning it is useful to explore the history of the notion 'race'. Barbara Jeanne Fields studies the race from the period of the slavery. She argues:

> Race as a coherent ideology did not spring into being simultaneously with slavery. During the heyday of the cotton empires in the nineteenth century that slavery, limited the need for free citizens (white people) to exploit each other directly and thereby identifying class exploitation with racial exploitation. (143)

She says that by doing so slavery permitted and required the white majority to develop its own characteristic form of racial ideology.

Likewise, Winthrop D. Jordon notes, "Negroes became slaves, partly because there were social and economic necessities in America which called for some sort of bound, controlled labor " (93), and Eric Williams insists, "Slavery was not born of racism" rather, racism was a consequence of slavery" (5). The popular conception of a race-based slave system did not fully develop until the 1700s. During the 1770s, Africans, both enslaved and free, helped rebellious English colonists secure American independence by defeating the British in the American Revolution. Africans and Englishmen fought side by side and were fully integrated. In 1863, during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation

Proclamation. The proclamation declared that all slaves in states who had seceded from the union were free.

No more in the post-slavery South was this evident that each slaveholding class had 'European roots' and carried 'a European inheritance into its American present', thus Social Darwinism would play a significant role in the justification of the emergence of 'Jim Crow' the segregation laws. Ruth Frankenberg says:

> For the greater part of…history…arguments for the biological inferiority of people of color represented the dominant discourse…for thinking about race. Within this discourse, race was constructed as a biological category, and the assertion of white biological superiority was used to justify economic and political inequities ranging from settler colonization to slavery. (24)

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, racially discriminatory laws and racial violence aimed at African Americans began to mushroom in the United States. These discriminatory acts included racial segregation, which was legally mandated by Southern states and nationwide at the local level or government, voter suppression or disenfranchisement in the southern states, denial of economic opportunity or resources nationwide, and private acts of violence and mass racial violence aimed at African Americans unhindered or encouraged by government authorities.

The Civil Rights Movement aimed at abolishing public and private acts of racial discrimination against African Americans between 1954 to 1968, particularly in the Southern United States. African Americans have improved their social and economic standing significantly since the Civil Rights Movement, and recent decades have witnessed the expansion of a robust, African American middle class across the United States. Nevertheless, due in part to the legacy of slavery, racism and

discrimination, African Americans as a group remain at a pronounced economic, educational and social disadvantage in many areas relative to European Americans.

Superiority of one group or its cultural practice exclusively defines another as the inferior because of the presence or absence of the characteristics that the former has. This perception that one group is superior to another is a false belief. Racism as "transmitted traits are linked to social characteristics" (Gerzina 126). Discrimination or the projection of hierarchy is a practice to maintain the perceived differences in the society.

Race studies, having inherited the 19th century traits, view at its peak in the present day. It does not mean that the practice and the study were not present before. It was present even in the Classical Greek and ancient Hebrew societies but in different levels. The race was mainly practiced by the westerns to define the non-westerns in terms of color, language and the civilization. Because of this, Africans were brought in America and condemned to be the slaves. The only law was the white and in front of the white people, the blacks knelt down and the most destructive and animalistic practice started in the human history with slavery.

Intra-racial Conflict in the Breedlove's House

Color itself is not a manifestation of a person's or a group's intellectual and cultural heritage and economic status. Color of skin or hair is not like a uniform that is changeable but has become a glass that changes the reality. When reality is perceived in terms of person's appearance-color of skin, hair, bodily structure, complexions, it becomes a source for the disintegration of any society. The prejudice of color may be held by both- one who sees the other and the other who is seen. This prejudice begins with the prefatory note in *The Bluest Eye*:

> 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. (*The Bluest Eye 3)*

The story of Pecola Breedlove, the daughter of the black parents Cholly and Pauline, is the epitome of a racially suffered girl who prefers loneliness as she is isolated because of her complexion and has aspired for blue eyes by which she thinks she would be loved everywhere. She is not comfortable with the society she belongs to. That's why, she is socially fragmented and has contemplated for the bluest eyes.

The plight of the girl caused by the familial fragmentation and rejection is narrated by other two girls, Claudia and Frieda:

> Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger. Mrs. Breedlove was staying with the woman she worked for; the boy Sammy was with some other family; and Pecola was to stay with us. Cholly was in jail. (12)

The vivid picture of Pecola and her chaotic, fragmented house is very apparently

narrated by Claudia. The family members of Pecola are not united together. The consequences of the racism in *The Bluest Eye* are intra-racial hatred, family conflicts, loneliness, and most importantly the chaotic world of the Black people. For example, though Claudia is a black girl, she is addressing a person from the same ethnic group as a ratty nigger. She tries to conceal herself of being a black girl by showing the blackness and ugliness to other.

The Absurdity of the Breedlove's House

The location of the house is presented as an isolated and deserted house. In this regard Claudia narrates:

> There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and thirty fifth street in Lorain, Ohio. It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. (24)

It is very eloquently presented that the house is irritating and melancholic. The frequently repeated word black, further, suggests the racism in the black ghetto. The frame of the house is gray, the telephone is black and never harmonizes with the neighborhood are the salient features of isolated and chaotic house which is nevertheless a symbol of melancholy.

The Breedlove family is isolated because they cannot resist that they are poor and ugly. In the era of slavery, Blacks were represented as the others, secondary and delicate. Instead of confronting the actual reality, who actually they are, they just follow their masters. Cholly narrates:

> The master had said, "You are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact,

> support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right". And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (28)

These family members of the Breedlove, instead of believing the fact that the outer complexion has nothing to do with their actual reality, they just succumb into the reality that being ugly and black means the secondary or outcast into the society where white people are dominant.

The narrator describes, "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" (28). Now their self-loathing has made their own lives more painful in which no one is in the uniformity of the familial ties. Their underlying reality, as they believe, is their race. They think themselves as inferior to the white and slowly the intra-racial hatred begins within them. On the one hand, they cannot challenge the reality and on the other hand, they are out of the clutch of their community.

Cholly, the father of Pecola, dwells upon drinking. Pauline, the mother of Pecola, who is crippled, hates her own daughter Pecola because she is extremely ugly; Sammy, the son of Pauline and Cholly, flees from the house, and Pecola, the protagonist of the novel, who is eleven-year-old, yearns for the bluest eye hoping that it would make her love. The ugliness of the Breedloves is narrated as:

> But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence

> directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family- Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy and Pecola Breedlove- wore their ugliness; put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. (28)

So the portrait of the house further intensifies that the characters living in the Breedloves' house are living dead. Although they are living under the same roof, sharing the same kitchen, their direction is different.

They lack the good communication and the harmonious familial ties. It is because:

> The only living thing in the Breedloves' house was the coal stove, which lived independently of everything and everyone, its fire being out, banked or up at its own discretion, in spite of the fact that the family fed it and knew all the details of its regimen. Sprinkle, do not dump, not too much…. The fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own schemata. (27)

It is very apparent that the only living thing in the Breedloves' house was the coal stove. What it signifies is that the coal stove itself is a non-living thing living in the Breedloves' house. It is not because they are only black and the blackness is the main cause of their hardship. Living the tormenting livelihood of each member and relating the past experience into present makes the Breedloves fragment. They, instead, blame each other for being the black though they are from the black parents which lead to the family fragmentation of the family.

Pecola's longing for Blue Eyes

The regular quarrel between Cholly and Polly does not only make Pecola lonesome but also condemns her brother Sammy to runway from the house. "To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of

life" (31). Pecola is not only rejected by her parents at home but also at school, even by her classmates. The reason behind this rejection is the color she possesses. This sort of rejection from everyone is rooted deeply inside her heart. She assumes that she would not be rejected rather loved or at least accepted if she had blue eyes.

She gives more importance to the color of eyes rather than to the color of skin. The following text reflects her craze for blue eyes:

> It has occurred to Pecola sometimes 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… 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. (34-35)

Pecola discovers her own ugliness when she realizes that she is terribly black. This internalization of her reality being black means rejection from her community. After that her days are gone looking in the mirror and tracing the blackness.

Claudia, in this regard, narrates, "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk" (34). Although there are many students in her class, she has no friends at all. She has realized the reality she is ugly which makes her separate from the same race and the same group of people. That actually creates melancholy in her life.

By being deserted from her own parents; from her classmates; and even from her teachers; Pecola, now, in her childhood, realizes that the reason behind this is the

color which makes her separate and unloved. Facing the mirror in her front, Pecola analyzes her beauty. She compares herself with other girls of her age and finds herself being extremely ugly. So, she fantasizes of having the bluest eye which will help her to confront the reality and she will be loved. With some sympathy upon Pecola, Claudia makes wishes:

> 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." (34)

Now, Pecola's existence in her own view is possible only in the acquisition of blue eyes; they are more than food and water for her. She decides to buy Mary Jane candy not for stomach but for eyes because the wrapper has a blonde, blue-eyed child.

Mr. Yokobowski, a white shopkeeper, does not look at Pecola. He deliberately urges his eyes to draw back "because for him there is nothing to see" (36). She finds him indifferent to her arrival and associates it with her blackness:

> But she has seen interest, disgust and 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 distance. She has seen it lurking in the eyes 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. (36-37)

The vacuum filled in Yokobowski's eyes is his deliberate willingness to distance himself from "a little black shaft of finger" (37). On the other hand, Pecola sees life in the picture of Mary Jane.

Separated from the real-life experience in the society, Pecola identifies herself with Mary Jane candy and absorbs it thinking that she has at least associated herself with Mary Jane and her eyes. She assuages her resulting, unearned shame with "nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane. Lovely Mary Jane for whom a candy is named" (38). Frieda and Claudia, who are searching for whisky that Pecola may given them because her father drinks, arrive at "Lake shore park, a city park laid out with rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, picnic tables" (81). At the moment Claudia describes why black people dream of things they don't have:

> 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. (81-82)

When people are excluded from the society in terms of inferiority of color and therefore, social status, they naturally make efforts to be included by having things that white people value because they can never discard their skin-color.

When Pecola visits the shop of Yokobowski, she does not talk to him actively. Although she desires to have Mary Jane, she has no guts to ask for it:

> "Christ. Kantcha talk?"
>
> His fingers brush the Mary Janes.
>
> She nods.

> "Well, why'nt you say so? One? How many?" (37)

The craziness of Pecola to have blue eyes is depicted implying her longing for the things which resemble the whiteness. "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" (38). Pecola is crazy about the blue eyes that mark the extreme beauty of whiteness. On the one hand, she is fantasying about grasping the extreme beauty and on the other hand it causes melancholy to her.

Every event that has happened in the life of Pecola is tangibly or intangibly associated with her internalized reality that she is ugly and in order to be loved she feels she must have the bluest eyes. When Pecola is sitting alone on the school playground, Louis Junior sees her and randomly takes her into his house to show the kitten. She, for the first time, sees a cat that excites her but her excitement remains no longer because the cat attacks her severely. The act of attacking by cat does not make her worry because she feels that the cat with blue eyes is good enough to attack which reinforces her desire to have blue eyes. Such type of fascinations for the blue eyes Pecola has brought in her mind.

At the same time she compares and contrasts herself with a white-skinned girl, Maureen Peal, who is loved more at school. Pecola knows:

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

Pecola, thus, hates herself, as she compares herself with a white girl, of being a girl

from the inferior class. In the same class a white-skinned girl is loved not only by her friends but also her teacher. The favorable condition of the white girl inside the classroom makes again Pecola lonely. The self-hatred of a poor, ugly, black girl, Pecola, is very vividly shown in the aforementioned indentation.

Instead of getting love and care from the classmates, Pecola gets agony, hatred and physical torture as well as mental torment. The teasing and torturing of her classmates makes her feel melancholy. Such situation causes her to feel down-hearted and neglected. "Pecola edged around the circle crying. She had dropped her notebook, and covered her eyes with her hands" (50). Pecola is ugly, untidy and unloved. She is vividly described when Geraldine, the mother of Junior, glances at her at her home in the moment when the cat is accidentally killed:

> She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair mattered 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 of the shoe. She saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up. (71)

In this way, an innocent girl, who should have nothing to do with the outer reality of the society, is forced to tolerate the bitter reality that being black means being outcast and unloved.

This kind of negligence from her own teacher, own classmates and even from her own parents makes her aspire blue eyes which she thinks will eventually change her existing situation. Pecola knows that if she had the blue eyes, the attitude of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove towards her would change. That is to say, the love between her parents would eventually maker her comfort to live in the Breedloves'

family. For this reason, Pecola yearns and longs for blue eyes.

Effect of the Past

The pathos of the Breedloves' lives lies in their complete alienation from each other and from the world; locked in their individual cells of consciousness, they are unable to give birth to each other, and to bring each other into the world of generative time. Cholly, the father of Pecola, is not an exception from suffering. His terrible experience of his childhood frequently haunts his present reality. He does not express such absurdity of his life apparently, but his activities towards his wife, Pauline, and his daughter, Pecola, very eloquently dramatize the fact that he cannot confront the actual reality, but shows his anguish and tribulation towards his family members.

When Cholly was in the womb of his mother, his father had run away from the life of unborn baby, and later on he was left alone in the railway station by his own mother after his birth. So he is deprived of both his maternal and paternal love. Later on, he is brought up by his aunt Jimmy to whom he really treats as his own mother. His happiness of being loved from Aunt Jimmy cannot last long when she dies. The life of Cholly is in the sea of sorrow where he has no one to share his joys and sorrows. When Cholly is fifteen, he is loved by a black girl, Darlene. His first sexual act with Darlene turns out to be the most embarrassing moment in his life where his ecstasy of heavenly pleasure becomes traumatic because of the presence of two elder white men. They insult him- "Get on wid it, nigger," said the flashlight one. "Sir?" said Cholly, trying to find a buttonhole. "I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (116). Faced with the loss of his Aunt Jimmy, and thus his home, Cholly is also confronted with society's negative view of who he is. In the same day he must come to terms with the loss of his family and connections and his introduction into violence and self-hatred, all while still a boy.

After Jimmy's funeral, Cholly goes off with a few others of about his age. He ends up alone with Darlene. Cholly's first sexual experience is interrupted and corrupted by a group of white hunters who essentially force Cholly to rape Darlene. Morrison writes, "There was no place for Cholly's eyes to go" (116). This recalls his daughter Pecola's failure to disappear due to her eyes. Neither can hide their eyes nor change how they are being seen. Woodward, in reference to Darlene, points out, "her instinctive reaction is to hide her eyes as a way of shielding herself from the shaming eyes of others. It is as if she cannot see anything, then perhaps she herself cannot be seen" (221). During this episode, as he will again, Cholly places his hatred not on the white men but on the black girl. He blames Darlene for what has happened to him as he will blame Pecola for what has occurred in her life.

Even after he has left his home, he cannot forget what has happened and even though he keeps the secret, "the vacancy in his head was like the space left by a newly pulled tooth still conscious of the rottenness that once filled it" (118). Morrison uses the tooth imagery here to further connect Cholly's experience with Pauline's and to express that there is no way to get rid of his pain. Cholly turns his hatred against the person who "bore witness to his failure . . . . The one he had not been able to protect" (118). He is unable to save either Darlene or Pecola, and instead of hating himself or the system that created the situation, he manages his pain by transferring it to the young girl. Cholly has also understood the reality that being a black means being outcast. That is why, he has been insulted by the two elder white men calling him the obscene word nigger. "When he was still very young, Cholly had been surprised in some bushes by two white men while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl" (31). After the first bitter sexual experience with his girlfriend, Darlene, the chain of mental torture does not end. It even puts him

in a vicious-circle when he hears the news of Darlene's pregnancy.

By hearing the news which he cannot endure, he decides to be far away from her life, as his father did with his mother. Instead of helping the poor black girl, Cholly leaves the place forever and decides to meet his father. "Cholly knew it was wrong to run out on a pregnant girl, and recalled with sympathy, that his father had done just that. Now he understood" (119). Slowly and gradually, Cholly suffers and begins to hate himself. After the sexual intercourse with Darlene, Cholly knows, he is insulted only for his race because he is a poor, humble and black person. So inter racial hatred takes place in the life of Cholly which he does not expose directly. For this reason, his hatred towards those who love him is expressed as:

> They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, and 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. (118)

The self-loathing of Cholly is reflected with the repetition of the words "they were white and strong" (118). By regarding those white elder people as superior, Cholly feels himself as inferior in race.

Black people have internalized the self-made reality that they are blacks means they are inferior. So they can never challenge white people which Cholly cannot deny. Cholly hates them who have created the problematic situation, the one who bears 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 was his first girlfriend.

Cholly compares the two worlds- the binaries between the black and the white.

Chances and opportunities always favor the white. So they are prosperous and industrious. But, blacks exist within their limited ghetto which is also made by the white. He mourns:

> 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." (133)

Pauline, the wife of Cholly, is not less traumatic than him when she is also haunted by her own past and frequently she gets shelter in her past life. Pauline recalls:

> When the war ended and the twins were ten years old, they too left school to work. 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. (88)

Pauline, from the very beginning of her childhood, suffers. At the age of fifteen, any girls can dream about men. But those dreams and fantasies are confined within her house. She dwells upon men only when she gets a little time from her household work. So, she is often melancholic.

When she gets married with Cholly, she wants to come out from the melancholy to a happy conjugal life. She dreams that her melancholy will be dissolved when she is in the embrace of her husband. "In her loneliness, she turned to her husband for reassurance, entertainment, for things fill the vacant places" (91). Pauline Breedlove is the cinema's primary victim, and her story gives shape and

context to Pecola's more general tragedy. As a child in Alabama, Pauline had cultivated the pleasure of ordering her small world, but she is an artist without the means to realize her creative impulses: "She missed- without knowing what she missed- paints and crayons" (87). When her marriage to Cholly deteriorates she has little else to do but go to the movies, where she is introduced to romantic love and physical beauty- the most destructive ideas in the history of human thoughts. "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 on absorbed in full from the silver screen" (95). The notion of absolute beauty commits Pauline to think of her world as a shadow, a projection of the perfect world where "white men (take) such good care of the women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses" (95).

Polly's dream of becoming jubilant with the knot with her husband does not move smoothly when the love fades away and the quarrel takes place instead:

> When Cholly began to quarrel about the money she wanted, she decided to go to work. Taking jobs as a day worker helped with the clothes, and even a few things for the apartment, but it did not help Cholly. He was not pleased with her purchases and began to tell her so. Their marriage was shredded with quarrels. (92)

When love fades away and misunderstanding and quarrel take place the relation cannot go longer. Cholly has no capacity to fulfill the desires of his wife, but he is making an object to his wife to go for the work in a white family.

From a young age, Pauline has felt excluded from society, and she has internalized the standards that exclude her until she defines herself and others based wholly on a system that dismisses her. As a girl, Pauline injures her foot and is left with “a way of lifting the bad foot as though she were extracting it from little whirlpools that threatened to pull it under” (86). This is indicative of how she sees her

place in the world. She is under constant threat of being pulled under. Pauline remembers good times from her childhood associated with color. She recalls the yellow of her mother's lemonade, purple from berries, and green june bugs. She even says, "I could feel that purple deep inside me" and "all of them colors was in me" (90). All of these positive experiences are a part of her, yet she is unable to overcome the black and white movies that communicate a standard of life that she fails to achieve.

As a child, Pauline showed a tendency toward order and would carefully arrange things, allowing her to have a measure of control over something in her life. Her family was careful to let her patterns remain, and if they occasionally messed one up, were quick to help her fix it. Pauline does not recognize this act as affection and instead focuses on how she is the only child without a nickname. As with the colors, she ignores the positive influences and concentrates on the negative. When she marries and moves north, Pauline feels herself to be isolated, in large part because she has never learned how to cross the barriers of silence that were erected during her childhood. Pauline is not welcomed into the community. No one reaches out to her, and she grows lonely. Morrison explains, "She was still no more than a girl, and still waiting for that plateau of happiness, that hand of a precious Lord who, when her way grew drear, would always linger near. Only now she had a clearer idea of what drear meant" (92). Pauline is merely a girl losing her innocence when she is forced into the harsh realities of the world with no one to guide her, a struggle she will in turn force on her daughter.

No one has warned her of the challenges she will face, and no one steps forward to tell her how to survive in the north. Because the black culture does not embrace Pauline and strengthen her black identity, the prevalent white ideals of

beauty, order, and general “rightness” assume a dominant role in Pauline’s life, and later in Pecola’s. Without another set of standards on which to judge, Pauline is left with what confronts her which is the white standard of beauty. The black community cannot accept Pauline, just as white society cannot accept them. Since Pauline has no alternative role models to base her values on, she is susceptible to the most prominent images.

The breaking point comes when Pauline loses her tooth, a loss representative of her experience of silence. The novel reads, “The weakened roots, having grown accustomed to the poison, responded one day to severe pressure, and the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place” (91). Here, Morrison is ostensibly talking about the tooth, but the metaphor suggests that what happens to the tooth parallels what happens to Pauline herself, and indeed to her daughter Pecola. Both have a weakened or nonexistent root system with family and community. The conditions of society allowed the setting, or community, that permitted the existence and suffering of Pauline and Pecola.

When Pauline discovers that she is pregnant, the habit of Cholly becomes, to some extent, changed. He is now concerned about his wife, and he drinks less. But Polly "went to the movies instead. There in the dark, her memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to her earlier dreams. Along with the ideas of romantic love, she was introduced to another thing- physical beauty" (95). Pauline works in a white family's house. When Pauline delivers the baby, Pecola, she hates her own baby. It is because she does not possess the standard beauty. It means Pecola is black and ugly. "Knowing that it hurts white women during delivery, she assumes herself to be hurt and when she begets the child it is ugly. Head full of pretty hair but lord she was

ugly" (98). Instead of knowing the reality that black parents have black child, Pauline also wants a beautiful baby like a white child. Such type of racial injustice and lack of resistance make the black family suffer. When Pauline is free, she enjoys movie because it is the source of fantasy. Besides, being a cripple she wants to be beautiful and a perfect woman which is not less than her fantasizing.

Racial Hatred: A Major Cause of Loss of Innocence

When whiteness stands as a hill that can never be shaken or embraced or penetrated, the arrow directed towards it returns and destroys one who has left it. But to be safe, he leaves the arrow rather to his community members who seem unable to let it back. It is not only a self-loathing and negation to attack one's own image but also a step to disintegrate ones own community and its cultural norms. Then the community divides itself in terms of light skinned color and deep skinned color, younger and older generations, male and female, etc.

The novel is dominated mainly by two families- the Breedloves and the MacTeer family. Claudia MacTeer, the narrator of the story, has the resistance power against the white dominated society. Claudia is very conscious of the perversity of this position and of its roots in racist society. As a child, she says, she hated Shirley Temple, "Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (13). Claudia recognized the diversion of feeling from her self and world into white values, emphasized by repeated references to white dolls, babies, and movie stars. She was fascinated by those images because they were loveable to everyone but her. She tried to dissect them, to discover or possess the magic they weaved on others, but finally she knew it was meaningless to run after the whiteness.

Claudia knew, even as a child, the force or alien cultural images. She knew

that white ideals denied her reality by forcing it into strange forms of appearance and experience. Her first reaction was appropriate: "She could feel only disinterested violence for what without relevance to his life, still regulated it" (15-16). The child Claudia learns false love rather than cuts herself off from the only model of loveableness she is offered. But Claudia, the adult narrator, sees that Shirley Temple cannot be loved or imitated because she is just a doll, and image without a self behind it. The crime of the racist society is not only the theft of black reality; it is the substitution of dead, external classifications for free self-definition. A society based entirely on the look, on the absolute reification of the others, reifies itself. If blacks are defined as slaves, whites are defined as masters; the Third is not a person at all, only an abstraction. There is finally a look with no one behind it, because the freedom to define the self is denied. The movie stars and pinup girls of the white culture are not models of selfhood. The message they carry is that human life is of no choice. To model one of them is to lose one's responsibility to create oneself in a world of others; to love them is to deny the equal freedom of others.

Unlike Pecola, Claudia challenges the hitherto belief about racism and confronts the reality- being black does not mean being outcast. That's why; she destroys all the dolls which are related to the whiteness. Claudia says, "I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas" (14). The first person narrator Claudia and her sister Frieda, who are comparatively happier than the Breedloves, are from a black family, and hate Rosemary Villanucci, one from middle-class white family, who enjoys living about her father's café and eating bread and butter. The MacTeer sisters need to go "to the railroad tracks where (they) fill burlap sacks with the tiny pieces of coal lying about" (10). The association of whiteness with bread and butter and that of blackness with

coal project hierarchy of whiteness and blackness in living standards.

Claudia understands the peripheral existence of black people as "an irrevocable physical fact, defining and completing our metaphysical condition" (17). In the world in which many of the qualities deemed desirable are generated by white fantasies, the Breedloves and the MacTeers are excluded; color of their skin marks them outsiders. The blacks, being a minority in caste and class, "However, move about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate (their) weakness and hand on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (17). Beneath the tangible differentness or exclusion are the intangible but even more powerful expectations and assumptions of the dominant white culture. Black people who are led to be outdoors become conscious of their condition. This racial marginalization and peripheral existence breed in the oppressed ones. Claudia narrates, "A hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a park, a grape arbor" (12). In desperation, they gather whatever they can afford and try to quench the hunger of property.

Pecola Breedlove, left by her father to face an outdoor life, is under the protection of the MacTeer. The MacTeer sisters like her because they find she doesn't like to dominate them. Pecola loves blue-eyes and white skin so much that she wishes to keep on drinking "milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup" (12). Claudia at first hates Shirley not "because it was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles" and a blue eyed yellow-haired, pink-skinned white doll as a gift at Christmas but later she realizes that she "had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of my (her) psyche which would allow me (her) to love her (Shirley)" (13). Claudia is not grown enough to understand the differences of being black and white.

Claudia dismembers a blue-eyed, white-skinned doll, a present she received at

Christmas, where as "adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-skinned, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (14). Claudia does not know that blue-eyes and blonde hair are admired by all but she does not possess them. The doll she receives at Christmas, the Shirley Temple mugs cannot measure her own lack of desirability. Claudia dismembers the doll's parts one by one to find out what it conceals to make it loved and admired. Her curiosity increases when people call the white girls on but not her. The dismembering of the doll is not so horrifying but "the truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to live white girls" (15). Her desire to comprehend the whiteness compels her to dismember the doll.

Claudia, unlike Pecola, has the resistance power but she even cannot deny the evil-rooted system existing in the society, where blacks are excluded from every opportunities. She says:

> 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 event and alter a human life. (150)

Claudia mourns for herself and the people of the black community who are existing in the ghetto. These black people cannot confront the reality, neither the white people nor the black pay attention into each other. What does the word "bigger and stronger" suggest by showing it to the white men? It is inferiority complex of the blacks because they cannot overcome from the self-made reality, i.e. blacks are delicate, fragile and subordinated. This binary opposition between the black and the white creates the black being oppressed and suppressed by the whites. The two races of the

people into the two different worlds are not only distinct from each other but are difficult to reconcile into one to make the community as an integrated whole.

The temptations to bad faith are enormously increased, since one's own reification can be escaped in the interlocking hierarchies that allow most of us feel superior to someone. Only the very unlucky, or the truly free, are outside this system. Pecola is so far outside the centre of the system- excluded from reality by race, gender, class, age and personal history- that she goes mad; fantasizing that her eyes would have turned blue and so fitted her for the world. But not all outsiders go mad or otherwise surrender. Further, the isolation makes Pecola so unable to connect with others that they often act cruelly, out of cold detachment or fleeting impulse. Cholly rapes his daughter because he feels no "stable connection between himself and his children… he reacted them, and his reactions were based on what he felt at the moment" (127). Commenting on Cholly's act, Claudia says, "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" (163). The main cause of the destruction and the loss of childhood innocence of Pecola is the racist society where black people cannot come out of it and become the victim like Polly, Cholly and the most importantly, Pecola.

Characters in the novel and their lives are affected by the racist society. Pecola is not only rejected by her own mother because of skin and color but she is also isolated by her friends as well as the teachers. That's why, she longs for having blue eyes thinking that blue eyes will make her become loved. She even cannot go to school and she knocks the door of Soaphead Church for giving her the strength. She says:

> "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." (138)

Pecola rushes to Soaphead Church to ask for help from him. She hopes his divinely power may decorate her with the blue eyes without which she cannot go to school where blacks' children are totally neglected by the teachers and the white boys.

Pecola fantasizes for the eyes that must be the bluest which causes the destruction in the life of Pecola. Claudia narrates:

> And fantasy it was, for 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. We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word. (163)

Hiding the reality from them and trying to mimic like the white causes the loss and later on the self-destruction in the lives of the black people. Pecola is the epitome of such reality which is narrated by Claudia. Pecola's family, friends and community victimize her by throwing blackness and ugliness at her. They seem to have purged themselves from it. She is a passive centre who receives all but never throws at any. Her subjective action, her prayer for blue eyes, renders her tragic failure. Her madness is an outcome of the community's self-consciousness to be at least less ugly than others and the racially divided society.

Being mad, she talks with her created self- whose response almost satisfies

her. She comes to believe that she has been granted the beauty that accompanies blue eyes. Her two friends talk about the reason of stopping going to school:

> What did you stop for?
>
> They made me.
>
> Who make you?
>
> I don't know. After that first day at school when I had my blue eyes.
>
> Well, the next day they had Mrs. Breedlove come out. Now I don't go anymore. But I don't care.
>
> You don't?
>
> No, I don't. They're just prejudiced, that's all.
>
> Yes, they sure are prejudiced.
>
> Just because I got blue eyes, bluer than theirs, they're prejudiced. (155)

In the novel, characters try to uplift themselves in a better world. When they consciously make efforts to conceptualize the white norms to be acceptable in the society, they forget the norms of their own race. They rather dispatch their ugliness and blackness and throw it at those who seem to be powerless.

Pecola is the one who suits for their purpose. Pecola, too, sees whiteness and white norms inevitable but she has no one under her to cast her ugliness. Her initiation turns to futility. All other members of the community, though they are black, dirty, ugly in the eyes of white people, exclude her as the whites do them, and not perceive her as "Other" while they want to be in the centre. Black people negate her and make her "Other" to show themselves in the centre. In the presence of her blackness and ugliness, they can be better, less ugly, less uncivilized. Some hate her to show her inferior as the whites. Those who love her love her violently or unproductively:

> 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. (163)

The love from the parents of Pecola turns out to be destructive love. Pecola always addresses her mother by Mrs. Breedlove. How far the relationship is intimated? It is clearly shown by the formal language spoken by a daughter to her mother. Likewise, the love of her father destroys the life of an innocent daughter. Cholly loves Pecola but it is fatal.

This novel caused every reader to examine the way people treat each other and ask themselves why it happens; the novel led these readers to a deeper understanding of the tragedy of the cruelty that occurs in a life of extreme loneliness. Pecola's internalization of visual absence also manifests itself in her desire to disappear:

> "Please make me disappear." 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. (33)

All the people in the community are too conscious of their skin-color and consequent status in the racially divided society. Unable to acquire the cultural standards of white race, they direct their hatred to their own community members who are considered to

be inferior within. The self-hatred of themselves causes the loss of innocence in their lives. The black boy's hatred to Pecola and her mother's assertion that she is an ugly girl are in fact self-loathing.

The prejudice of race not only divides people of distinct color but also causes the loss of innocence within them. Color division and subsequent reclamation of racial beauty is not a problem of the contemporary period, it is an everlasting ill-rooted problem existing in the society. The reconciliation of the different races to make a whole is impossible due to the superiority of one race over another and the dominant to dominate and those inferiors hate themselves for being such and the loss always exist.

Silence can be dangerous when the information withheld could provide protection. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores the cost of keeping quiet. By describing a community that does not fully educate or inform its members, the novel depicts its valuing personal protection over communal success, a choice that weakens community ties and leads characters to isolation. Many things are kept quiet in the novel although the novel itself is the narrator’s, and the author’s, act of speaking up. As young girls, Claudia MacTeer, one of the narrative voices, and the protagonist, Pecola, suffer from this silence. However, the degree to which they suffer varies widely. Claudia survives and is able to see the need for communication within the community, while Pecola merely becomes the town’s scapegoat, driven to insanity by the silence. Secrets are maintained at several levels, from society at large, to community, to the intimacy of family and finally to Pecola herself, as a victim. Morrison illustrates that these secrets will eventually destroy those who are keeping them, and from whom they are being kept.

The reader is not able to forget the harmful silencing influence of society and

is reminded of it again in the image of Claudia's doll. Claudia explains, "I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll. . . . [p]icture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls" (13). As with the Dick and Jane primers, Claudia is learning how to behave from a book that does not truly relate to her life. She goes on to say that the doll "resisted my flesh" (13). While her observation is based on a physical experience, the doll also resists her on a psychological level. The white baby doll being held as the ideal symbolically denies that Claudia's body can be beautiful. She is aware of this dilemma. Morrison describes a scene where, while taking a bath, Claudia revels in her scars and dirt, essentially appreciating her own body. The next line is "I destroyed white baby dolls" (15), which might seem incongruous, but actually reveals that Claudia understands that, in order to love herself, she cannot love the doll that denies her value. Claudia even acknowledges, "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (14). The entire world is keeping quiet about other types of beauty. She realizes that this is the standard applied not only to dolls, but girls too, merely because "all the world had agreed."

Claudia destroys the dolls to try and uncover the mystery of their beauty and power. She is attempting to discover for herself what everyone else is keeping secret. Patrice Cormier-Hamilton explains that "When Claudia destroys her white doll with its glassy blue eyes; she demonstrated pride in her identity and the ability to understand, to some degree, the repressive values pervading her black community" (121). In appreciating her own self-worth, Claudia has the strength to damage the doll, an action that represents what her ideas of self-worth do to the pervasive societal ideas of beauty. In acting on her feelings, she diminishes the power of society. Trinna S. Frever writes that this is the "longing of the girl character, woman author, and/or

woman reader for an image that is more fully made in her own image, rather than as an outside culture would make her" (136). Claudia wants to alter society to include her, not change who she is to fit into society.

However, while Claudia may destroy her own dolls and protect her self-image, she alone cannot destroy what the doll symbolizes, and no one is speaking up on her behalf. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The adults in her life are outraged over her destruction of the dolls. They intend to give her a gift, something they never received as children, but they fail to realize that a model of white beauty is not what she wants or needs. They do not ask her what she wants. They fail to communicate with her and fall into the stereotypical assumptions.

Society's images pervade other types of media as well, and the girls are surrounded and silenced by this media. Under its influence, they are forced to keep quiet about their own beauty and self-worth. This influence can be seen in the image of Shirley Temple that Pecola loves. Pecola is especially preoccupied with the image of Shirley Temple on a mug. Morrison writes, "She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face" (12). Pecola has accepted society's judgment of Shirley Temple as ideal and, as she can never look like her, wants to be close to her in any way possible. The novel goes on to say that Pecola was "fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley's face" (16). Pecola drinks three quarts of milk in order to spend more time with the picture of society's ideal beauty.

Donald Gibson writes, "If she drinks enough white milk from the chalice, she may become like the stuff she imbibes and as well become like the image adorning the container itself" (23). Pecola literally internalizes the dominant view of beauty. Kuenz says, "interaction with mass culture for anyone not represented therein, and

especially for African-Americans, frequently requires abdication of self or the ability to see oneself in the body of another" (422). Society has taught Pecola that to see herself as beautiful, she must be someone else, someone more like Shirley Temple. Debra T. Werrlein explains, "Morrison points to the particular predicament of black *girls* in a white nation. For power they need beauty, and for beauty they need whiteness" (63). Since Pecola cannot obtain "whiteness," she is denied power.

Pecola repeats her attempt to consume beauty by eating Mary Jane candies. In order to become more like Mary Jane, a blonde, blue-eyed little girl on the candy wrapper, Pecola buys and savors them as a treat. When her anger over being slighted is too weak to endure, she turns to the candy for strength. She tries, in a startlingly literal way, to internalize the beauty that would guarantee her a place in society and end her isolation. While Claudia gets angry and destroys images that belittle or deny her, Pecola absorbs them. No one is educating the girls on their value as people, and they are left simply to fail by the standards of society.

Like Pecola, the community absorbs and perpetuates the ideal of society. In doing so, they put into practice the repression of society. They keep quiet about their own feelings and adopt the dangerous views that deny their worth. The black community, repressed by society, in turn represses its members who fall short of their standards. These standards and the practice of keeping quiet in society are in turn absorbed by Pecola and Claudia's community. The community's silence is particularly difficult for Pecola and the reader because the community is so important. Claudia observes, "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" (11). Claudia knows that the community must "consolidate" to survive. The community members can share strengths and weaknesses and so help others and receive help in

turn, but Pecola is denied this consolidating membership within her community. Miehyeon Kim explains that Morrison is "highlighting the interaction between the black community and its individual members" (109). In Pecola's case, interaction is denied. Instead of being accepted as a member of the community, she is used by it to make them feel better.

Claudia observes that "Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information" (5). It is this lack of communication and information that will make these girls susceptible to the harmful standards of society. The girls desperately need instruction from their community and their parents to counteract the messages they are receiving from society. Claudia further comments that "We didn't initiate talk with grown-ups; we answered their questions" (16). She does not say that the adults answered the children's questions or even that they, as children, asked questions. This environment of silence within the community allows the prevailing white standards to continue unchallenged. Kathleen Woodward claims that "the girls are attuned to the moods and emotions that envelope them, but because of their young age they do not understand" (218). As children, they can sense that there are problems and inconsistencies within their community, but no one explains to them what is happening or what it means. They are forced to wonder and speculate on their own in silence.

As narrator, Claudia is using her own family to represent the general conduct of the black community. The confusion brought on by silence can be seen in the novel when Claudia is sick. Claudia remembers, "My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness" (7). Her mother does not communicate what is really causing her anger, and as a child, Claudia misunderstands. In adulthood, Claudia will come to

realize what her mother was doing, but Pecola will never understand such subtleties of anger within her own dysfunctional family as her development will be tragically stunted. She will never receive the benefits of being able to look back with a mature perspective.

Besides the lack of communication between Claudia and Mrs. MacTeer, the reader gets the image of keeping quiet with Mr. MacTeer. Morrison writes, “he gives us instructions about which doors to keep closed or opened for proper distribution of heat . . . and teaches us how to rake, feed, and bank the fire. And he will not unrazor his lips until spring” (47). Their father is teaching them how to maintain the fire, but he is also teaching them to keep quiet. The girls have internalized this practice of silence as demonstrated when Mrs. MacTeer is angry about Pecola drinking so much milk. Claudia and Frieda feel bad for Pecola, but they do not stand up for her. They have learned that their role in the community is one of silence.

In portraying Pecola Breedlove, Morrison is faced with the task of maintaining the sense of the child’s innocence--that is, her acceptance of color ideology at face value--and demonstrates how that ideology destroys her. Pecola is presented always from a third person narrative point of view, either by the omniscient narrator or by the first person narrator, Claudia, until the last chapter of the novel, when she is given voice in a first person dialogue with her imaginary friend.

Pecola is first portrayed as she is seen by Claudia when she comes to live with the MacTeers as a "case" for charity. Pecola agrees to anything the girls want her to do. When she gets her period, she is shocked. When she finds out someone as to love her in order for her to have a baby, she wonders how to make someone love her. The second time we see her, she is lying in bed paralyzed with fear and aversion as her parents and brother fight viciously. As an eleven year old innocent girl, she is the

weakest member of her family and her society. She cannot act to end the domestic violence of her household, she cannot speak up to stop it, she can only try to disappear by an effort of the imagination. It is here that Morrison begins the portrayal of this child's strong imagination. As her parents fight, she concentrates all her imaginative energy on disappearing, and can succeed in imagining all her body dissipated except for her tightly sealed eyelids. The focus on eyes is thus subtly introduced.

Pecola's lack of information causes trauma in even natural events, as seen when she begins to menstruate. Pecola is afraid that the blood means she is going to die. No one has explained to her how her body works. This is just another example of her confused body image. What should be seen as natural is frightening to Pecola. Pecola is so scared and confused that she begins to cry. When Mrs. MacTeer finds the girls, she thinks they are misbehaving and begins to whip them. At first, she does not listen to Claudia's protests. It is important to note that Claudia is the one who speaks up to defend their actions, for we can see that she is, in a small way, beginning to understand the consequences of silence. When Mrs. MacTeer finally listens, she realizes her mistake and "Her eyes were sorry" (22). Later, in one of the few scenes where Pecola is shown in a positive interaction with anyone in her community, Claudia can hear her mother laughing with Pecola. When the girls are in bed that night, Pecola, in one of the most troubling lines of the novel, asks, "how do you get somebody to love you?" (23). Pecola has no personal experience with love and is merely trying to understand why. Gibson says, "Nearly everything that happens in Pecola's life demonstrates to the reader and to herself that nobody loves her" (26). She has received no indication of affection or love from any source.

The society in which Pecola Breedlove lives is based on keeping secrets to maintain the status. Media, functioning as a representative of society, tells only one,

narrow version of the truth, withholding the whole picture. In order for the majority to retain their sense of power, they must disenfranchise the minority. Society does not merely repress certain individuals; it justifies such action to the repressed and teaches them to repress themselves.

CHAPTER-IV

Racism: Major Factor of Pecola's Loss of Innocence

Social scientists believe that American society is evolving through an interaction among people of different colors. Though the society is multi-racial and consequently multi-cultural, the habit of projecting hierarchy of white supremacy and domination, black inferiority and submission is rampant. The lower part of social ladder is vacant for people of color especially black ones. They are viewed as unproductive and barren soil that can never contribute to America's development. The continual efforts made by the blacks to erase the prejudice that they are inferior in heart and mind are overlooked and they are always labeled with problem creating people.

In the English literature, there is a battle between two views: that the blacks have no presence in mainstream literature and that Afro-Americans are the power givers to the whites, who see nothing in black images as Yokobowski does with Pecola. Afro-American's claim has certainly never come from the void but from the presence of blackness. If we say well to one then we are creating the binary of bad at the same time. Rosemary is white and Maureen is cute only because the MacTeers and the Breedloves seem black and ugly.

Once the superiority of whiteness is established, it is a human instinct for black people to have the things they lack but the white possess. It is natural to believe that they lack whiteness but unconvincingly do they lack equality, freedom, and prosperity? So their efforts are always towards the possession of them not whiteness. Unable to attack the supremacist belief, they try to conceptualize and internalize the white norms. But mixing whiteness in blackness hardly succeeds and it brings about the collapse of individual identity and communal norms. Concerning Geraldine's case,

she succeeds to imitate the white norms but the result is grotesque.

Race in America has not bounded itself in biological categorization of people of color. It has transgressed the hierarchy of color and referred to other categorization such as in class, institution, etc. Pecola, the protagonist of the novel, cannot act and perform according to her culture or race. Rather she wants to resemble the white child; she wants to be loved like a white child. Due to these feelings of inferiority complex of physical beauty which has nothing to do with the actual reality, she loses her own label and becomes crazy of having blue eyes.

If the concept of race is practiced healthily, it is a rich source of social integration and cultural development. It otherwise brings psychological splits and disintegration in the society. The psychological splits and divisions of black people mirror their cultural situation. They are figuratively maimed and mutilated because of their failure in material gain, social status, equality and identity. Construction of the growths of the self is implicitly linked to restrictive and oppressive cultural circumstances. The Dick and Jane family, an ever present unclear family, enjoys all social standards; white men with gun who handle the power. Yokobowski, a member of middle class white family, enjoys economic boom; and Rosemary, who boasts upon her house, butter and bread is absent in black community. The dream of the MacTeers and the Breedloves families are filled with desire, for failures are filled with desire for prosperity and equality. Because of this failure, they are dehumanized, isolated and driven to the loss of innocence and suffering which finally paves the way for destructiveness.

Pecola's ugliness, defined visually by white standards, forces her into a position of invisibility and absence, which in turn becomes her only mode of presence. She hides herself behind the ugliness of the mainstream culture, which

won't look at Pecola's desire to be perceived as a human being in order to exist at all is concentrated in her sad fantasy of obtaining blue eyes. Seeing whiteness and blue eyes everywhere, she comes to realize that life relies on them. Through them, she might see and be seen as a real person and thus acquire the self-determination denied by her race and circumstances. Unable to exist into her own eyes, she exists only in the images reflected by other's eyes. In the process, she takes the position of an object, never of a subject.

Black people view their minds and souls through white lenses because of the flaws of American society. White oppression has become the hindrance to follow the proposition of the self-love and love of others. Pecola searches for love and beauty but the society at first and then even the black community became the hindrance. Pecola is robbed of her innocence in many ways and by different situations. When the light skinned new girl Maureen walks home with the girls she acts like she wants to be Pecola's friend. She buys her ice cream. Once she has baited her, she begins to question Pecola about seeing a naked man and questions her about seeing her own dad naked. It all hits before Pecola can really see it coming and it leaves her hurt and slumped.

Junior tricks Pecola telling her that he has a kitten. Pecola loves kittens and follows him to see it. He slams the door and shuts her in a room. Once she finds the cat in the room she is comforted. He then goes into the room and starts pulling on her clothing, but when his mother hears them they are struggling and the cat gets thrown and killed. Geraldine screams at Pecola and curses her. Pecola has lost another part of her innocence. Pauline, Pecola's mother lost her innocence in her marriage to Cholly and through having children. She had to go to work and work hard to provide for the family. Because of her loss of her own childhood that had slipped away, she

developed a hatred for anything such as dreams and mythical ideas.

Pecola, unnoticed by the external reality, is deserted by her own mother because she lacks the whiteness. The frequent quarrel between her mother and father that causes suffering to both of them; her friends' and teachers' rejection towards her, are the reasons that drive her crazy to have blue eyes by which she thinks in innocence, she will be loved everywhere. This racist society not only creates disturbance to Pecola's life but also to Cholly and Pauline. Pecola cannot recognize her own worth but runs after the black's internalized self –made reality that being black means inferior. After her innocent belief about the bluest eyes she has made an imaginary friend for the companion she has never had, as well as the devoted admirer of her blue eyes. Pecola, who could not figuratively see before, had remedied the problem. Now she literally sees herself in the most twisted and tragic way. Ultimately, the pressure of society and her own self-hatred drive Pecola to lose her innocence. Pecola's loss of innocence is observed as a result of her self-hatred of being a black/ugly girl and her fantasy of blue eyes.

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