

## I. Political Initiation Generating Originality in the Novel

In this thesis, I have tried to examine the aesthetics of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*. I intend to explain the novel's characteristics as a black literature and what incited the lying originality of the black art in the novel. Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* strikes as being simultaneously very political and artistic.

I was inspired to study *The Bluest Eye* because Morrison is one of my favourite novelists and *The Bluest Eye* is her masterpiece. The novel portrays the real picture of the black's life, the pains of segregation, the demoralization and self-hatred. Apart from this, the narration is absolutely faithful to the blacks. Thus it has the real essence of the black aesthetics. I have tried to examine how, out of all the segregation and domination Morrison, herself being a black and a woman could so clearly and openly voice the immense pains of domination so well with the originality of black narration.

I studied several criticisms on Toni Morrison and her works and thus came to the point that the political movements of the blacks during the 1960s and beyond had played remarkable roles in the emergence of the novel with such an essence of black art. Willian Andrews comments, "Black arts literature addresses the major concerns of the black political movements of the 1960's and beyond, and it is written in a style that is faithful to Black English and culturally specific story-telling traditions" (74).

Morrison seems to have taken political concerns very seriously. She readily agrees that the novel has an ideological agenda; "The work must be political. It must have that as its thrust . . . The best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time"(Heinze 9). *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970, during an era active with black political movements. Morrison was influenced by the ideologies of the

black power, black aesthetic and women's liberation movements. *The Bluest Eye* is rich with political influences, and the novel is also the most personal of Morrison's narratives.

The central theme of the book: inferiority complex and the black's feminist concerns projected through Pecola, a twelve year old girl character in the novel evolves from a real incident the author experienced in elementary school. Her black classmate confessed to her that she wanted blue eyes. The incident left Morrison stunned and angry, her worldview changed. The words of her classmate never left her mind until she poured her frustration towards "racial self-loathing" (Morrison 210) into her first novel.

Morrison writes from her own ethnic experience. She writes about the black experience, and the narrative style of her novel is authentically black. Yet, her writing is not propaganda; but is simply about spreading the awareness about the black minority whose ethnic existence is threatened by the white society. *The Bluest Eye* particularly portrays the pains of segregation, discusses the experience of the oppressed black minorities in isolated communities. The whites always disabled the emergence of a healthy African-American self-image. In such a state, the emergence of a novel like *The Bluest Eye* was a remarkable achievement for the black society and that was not an easy job. Several factors were inciting this emergence. In this thesis, I intend to examine those. The factors are political.

Morrison uses styles in her narration that can be traced back to the African-American storytelling tradition. The aesthetics of language, nature and personal experience can easily be traced in her work as distinctively black as well as subject matter. Morrison's unique style traces back to her personal and cultural background. The author grew up in a black, working-class

family in Lorain, Ohio, the town interestingly serving as the setting for *The Bluest Eye*. Her grandparents were avid storytellers, and her parents brought the influences of rhythm in African-American music into her consciousness. Her upbringing in a household emphasizing ethnic pride and the uniqueness of black culture profoundly influenced her writing style.

Though Morrison's ideas of racism, loss of ethnic identity, poverty and oppression can be viewed as stern to the blacks and the whites alike, they are fixed to her style that softens the edges of the controversial issues. Morrison tries to bring black issues into general awareness, even though she specifically writes about blacks, for black audiences, using inherently black stylistic and structural devices. In *The Bluest Eye* in particular, the responsibility for the main character's destruction falls equally on the black and the white society. The whites have always been oppressive, yet the blacks have internalized the abuse. None of the author's novels offer definite answers to the problems in them, but they do bring into awareness the issues of the underclass.

Morrison's concerns for the black society and the perseverance of its unique culture can be seen throughout her literary work. She always focuses on marginalization and alienation of blacks in white society. The lack of empowerment and ethnic pride are the major voids she aims to fill for her black audiences. In doing so, Morrison educates the whole society of the uniqueness of her inheritance.

Morrison's writing remains thematically and stylistically consistent, concentrating on representing African-American culture. The issues of ethnic inequality, black community and individuals' struggle in white society, as well as the empowerment of blacks through the realization of their rich inheritance, continues to represent themselves in the author's novels. She calls for her audiences, both black and white, to heightened awareness.

My thesis aims to answer the research question of what aids in making *The Bluest Eye* black arts literature. I will combine the political and stylistic perspectives of the novel in a multidimensional analysis. This perspective provides an overall study of *The Bluest Eye* that is not limited to a narrow critical view.

The structure of my thesis is the following. In chapter two, I will give relevant information on the major black political movements influencing the time around the publication of the novel. Afterwards, I will concentrate on the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* in chapters three and four. Two major perspectives will be studied. First, how the black arts' political concerns manifest themselves in the novel, and secondly, how her stylistic and structural devices contribute to the perseverance of black culture. Viewpoints of several African-American literature critics, such as Harold Bloom, Denise Heinze, Thomas March, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Bernard Bell and bell hooks, will be included in the thesis.

## II. Political Scenario Inspiring Black Arts

Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze how the novel has become a masterwork of Black literature, it is important to gain understanding of the black aesthetic movement and its background. In this chapter, I'd like to discuss about the black power movement; first, the ideology behind the artistic expression of black arts. Secondly, black women's liberation movement, how black women craved for freedom, since it originated as a black power movement for women, and Morrison's text has many black feminist undertones. Thirdly, black arts will be discussed, to clarify how the ideologies of the black power and the black women's liberation manifest themselves in the movement that emphasizes the artistic expression of black empowerment. Knowledge of the political influences of the time Morrison wrote her first novel will give a meaningful perspective into her art. The last sub-chapter gives background and introduces the story of *The Bluest Eye*

*The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970, during the time of political instability and strong nationalistic confusion among blacks. The militant Civil Rights activist Malcolm X had been assassinated in 1965 followed by the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the pacifist leader of the civil rights movement. Violence towards blacks was an important issue across the country. The remarkable, yet gradual, achievements of King's movement were not satisfactory anymore. King wanted to work towards settlement among the races together with the whites. The new black nationalistic groups that emerged wanted to find their strength within the African-American culture, values and community. Black reality became its own entity, unwilling to

compromise with any other ideology or ethnic group.

to 1964. She admits she was not nationalistically active during the time; however, she had strong views on improving the education system for the blacks. Though she did not adopt the specific agendas of the emerging black movements of the time, but she certainly felt the necessity to improve the state of black literature. Morrison was not a militant activist for the black power. However, her novels address the ideologies of black empowerment and black cultural awareness that were the founding principles of the Black Nationalist movements. Now the following sub-chapters discuss the black power and the black women's liberation movements, as well as address how the black arts manifest the arts of the two.

### **Black Power Movement to Strengthen the Blacks' Existence**

The black power movement rose to protest the many acts of violence against the activists involved in the civil rights cause in the 1960's. The leader of the black power was Stokely Carmichael, a former student of Morrison's at Howard. The movement abandoned the ideas of integration with the whites, demanding a new era that would form only on the foundation of African-American heritage, culture and unity. Schools and universities were to change their curriculum to acknowledge the blacks' contributions to the academics, and black communities were to have their own structures separate from the whites. Blackness was beautiful and a new value system was to replace any white ideals that were forcing the blacks into an inferior position, whether it was due to their skin color, thought processes or ancestry. The movement was militant and arranged numerous riots and demonstrations.

Even though the tangible boundaries of racial segregation were changed during the lenient civil rights movement, the activists of the black power strongly felt that blacks, as well as

other racial minorities, were treated like an underclass by the white supremacist society. Howard Cruse, a social critic of the time, wrote on the subject of "domestic colonialism" (Bell 237). He pictured blacks as living like the people in developing countries, suffering from degrees of malnourishment, intellectual marginalization and lack of an equal opportunity as individuals contributing to the society. Morrison seems to share Cruse's sentiment in her novels. She writes about blacks as the outcast of the society. "The black community is a pariah community", she states, ". . . the concept of the black in this country is almost always one of the pariah" (Tate 129). In her writing, Morrison illustrates how the survival of the black community is possible only if it adopts and cherishes its own heritage and value system. She continues to echo the principles of the black power movement in her novels, long after the movement integrated into other ideologies.

### **1970's Black Women's Liberation Movement**

Toni Morrison is undoubtedly a black feminist author. *The Bluest Eye* addresses the issues of domestic violence, rape and incest that were the focus of the black women's liberation movement of the 1970's. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., one of the most respected scholars in African American studies, lists *The Bluest Eye* as one of the monumental works in black women's literary tradition, together with Toni Cade Bambara's anthology, *The Black Woman*, Maya Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings*, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (Gates 2). However, Gates also mentions, "Morrison is an author who has bridged black feminism and black aesthetic" (Gates 4). Here I have, analyzed *The Bluest Eye* as black arts literature, even though the particularly feminist concerns will be addressed in a separate sub-chapter.

The movement for the black women's rights roots back among the female activists of the black power. But the intension of the black power was to establish a patriarchal hierarchy similar

to the white society in African-American family structure. So, the women in the movement were not assigned equal responsibilities in the struggle against racial inequality, and they were dismissed from black power.

“The black women's liberation movement, as well as its white counterpart, can be classified as second-wave feminism. These new, politically and socially active movements emerged in the 1960's from the women's suffrage movement that had originated in the late 1900's” (Berkley 202). The white women were mostly concerned with entering the workforce and separating themselves from men, while the black movement emphasized the oppression of the whole race. Black women's focus was not so much in economic or financial equality and because the women had never had the luxury of staying at home; they had been introduced to the so called “privilege” of work throughout their lives. According to Morrison, the black women had to have their own ideology, instead of contributing to the white middle-class housewives' empowerment.

In fact, this movement for the liberation for the Black women had to have its own ideology, but was faced with issues far more complicated than its white counterpart. All the African-American people were deprived of true equality: women, men and children alike.

The movement was called for unity rather than independence. At the beginning, there was a hindrance in addressing black male chauvinism, in a manner preventing separation and alienation between the sexes. This obstacle did not only exist as a gender issue, but attention had to be paid to the fact that the dominant white society and its value system burdened and stressed the relationship between black men and women. Then, focusing on black women's strength without ignoring the fact that they still suffered from racism, overload of responsibilities and poor healthcare. Finally, if the movement was to stay politically strong, it



had to join other groups. The challenge was to accomplish integration without compromising the integrity and unique situation of the black woman.

The integration slowly became possible in the 1970s when the racial tension lessened, together with the establishment and influence of the National Women's Political Caucus. The liberal branch of the women's liberation initiated the group. "The Caucus concentrated on increasing women's power in politics, and was committed to fight against 'sexism, racism, institutional violence, and poverty'" (Berkley 52). Black feminists could find value in trying to influence these more encompassing societal concerns, and found the themes more worthy of attention than the mere struggle between men and women.

Henry Louis Gates remarks, "Toni Morrison's narratives have a particularly feminist undertone. She regards the thoughts of Zora Neale Hurston, whose novels have been claimed as 'the symbols of a reclaimed [black feminist] literary tradition'" (Gates 9). Morrison's narratives have a particularly feminist undertones.

Morrison has special consideration on the issues of the black women's liberation movement. Jacqueline Jones has mentioned, "Morrison claims that the black woman 'had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may very well have invented herself'" (Jones 315). "Especially in her earlier novels, Morrison thrives to illustrate the multifaceted and often harsh conditions of black women, shedding light to their ignored condition in the past. However her focus is not of a radical feminist" (Berkley 202). She does not regard patriarchy as the only reason behind women's struggles in life. The themes of her work lean more towards the issues of racial justice and empowerment.

### **Essence and the Principles of Black Aesthetic Movement**

The black aesthetic movement roots back to the Black Power Movement of the 1960's. It was highly influenced by the ideologies of Black power. The movement also carries some essence of the 1920's and 1930's Harlem Renaissance that was all about rediscovering the roots of black culture and heritage, dating back to slavery. Some of the major literary figures of the Harlem era included a critic W.E.B. Du Bois, and authors James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes and Nella Larsen. All these movements influenced the black arts and ideologies but the Black Aesthetic Movement was more organized, political and widespread.

The black arts emerged to promote art that illustrated African-American music, language, heritage and beauty. In order to be substantial, art had to have a proudly black subject matter and style; be it a sculpture, a piece of music, a novel or a poem. Empowered by the concepts of the black power, the movement inspired the emergence of black theatre groups, magazines, and printing presses. "Publications such as Negro Digest/Black World, and emerging black artists, like poets Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez, provided some of the artistic and political commentary of the time" (Andrews 73). The theory of the black aesthetic was codified in collected works, such as Larry Neal and Amiri Bakara's *Black Fire* anthology, and Addison Gayle, Jr.'s collected criticisms *Black Expression* and *The Black Aesthetic* (Gates XXV).

The black artists were determined to produce art for the blacks, about the blacks, abandoning the Eurocentric models of respecting beauty and expression. They were determined to produce art for the blacks, about the blacks. The ideology encouraged artists to spread awareness about the oppressed and the marginalized position of the blacks. The hardships and the history, but also their cultural perseverance had to be addressed. In the past, especially the black literature seemed to address the white society. The artists' of the new era did not aim to explain the black experience, culture or value systems; they

demanded black art to rise and challenge the established Western canon of art.

The blacks were constantly struggling towards the white culture's ideals, even though the dominant society disabled them from reaching the Eurocentric goals. The blacks were always deprived of their empowerment because they always had the oppressive white social structure blocking right before them. Black writers wanted to concentrate on solving the problems of the African-American community from the inside, developing awareness of the rich black heritage and gearing the community to realize its worth. The time had come for blacks to stop internalizing the image of being the inferior in the society as a whole. The population had to find strength, beauty and self-esteem within.

The black arts, a movement "characterized by acute self-awareness", produced writers like Morrison, Angela Davis, Alice Walker and June Jordan. Morrison is undeniably an author who internalizes the main concerns of the aesthetic. She writes about black oppression, consciousness and tradition. Her major characters' are black and they are in constant search for their ethnic identity.

Morrison's style reflects black traditions of storytelling, highlighting the black aesthetics. The spoken dialogue in her novels is distinctively black, again confirming the importance Morrison places on her culture's oral traditions. She uses black folklore and mythology in her work as a structural element, affirming her connectedness to black history. She serves as a messenger and a reminder of the rich African-American heritage that has kept the culture alive in the midst of suffering and oppression. In Morrison's opinion, trying to ignore one's history hinders the growth of a healthy and wholesome individual. Her narratives' main purpose is to spread knowledge and awareness, entertainment is not a substantial value for her: "It [the narrative] is, I believe, one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge" (Lester 126).

Morrison has internalized her responsibility as an author to educate and awaken, rather than offer soothing oblivion and abandonment of ethnic pride.

### **An Overview on *The Bluest Eye***

The story came into being while Morrison was working as an editor for Random House. She felt that the controversial idea needed a larger audience. After being rejected by several publishers, finally it was published in 1970 and because of the general political upheaval of the 1970's, the first publication of the novel wasn't a success. The canon of black women writers' literary criticism was not established enough to analyze the novel to the full extent. The novel did not enjoy wide appreciation before being republished in the 1990's. In her 1993 afterword to *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison concludes that the earlier publication of the novel was like the main character's tragedy: "dismissed, trivialized, misread" (Morrison 216). Today, Morrison and her work are held in high regard among the critics and the public, and she is studied and read in schools around the world.

*The Bluest Eye* is a tragic tale of African-American suffering, set in Lorain, Ohio. The events in the novel occur within a time span of one year, beginning in the autumn of 1940. The setting is not only significant due to the fact that Morrison grew up in Lorain, it signifies something embedded in the history of the blacks. The northern United States represented an opportunity for the black population of the 1940's. The booming steel industry and the growing cities promised a change for the better for the southern black who was accustomed to low-paying work in the fields. In many cases, the opportunities did not present themselves when blacks arrived to the north. Work was hard to find, and racist ideologies were strongly present in the minds of the whites and the European immigrants.

The main character of *The Bluest Eye* is Pecola Breedlove, a 12-year-old black girl. She

is unfortunate enough to have parents like Cholly and Pauline Breedlove - an unemployed drunk and a maid who lives in an escapist fantasy. Pecola's brother Sammy is mentioned only in passing, in his attempts to escape home. Upstairs to the Breedloves is an apartment occupied by three prostitutes, Miss Marie, China and Poland. They offer an interesting counterpart to the community, treating Pecola better than either her parents or the neighborhood would.

The MacTeer family offers a counterpoint to the Breedloves. Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer are hardworking people, who take care of their children Claudia and Frieda, even in the midst of hardship in their lives. Claudia acts as the main narrator of the text, remembering the situations from an adult retrospect. Pecola, Claudia and Frieda form a friendship. However, the MacTeer sisters cannot prevent Pecola's destruction.

Pecola is not loved. She does not receive affection at home; she is teased at school and ignored by the community. Pecola begins to think her misery is due to her ugliness; her self-esteem is non-existing. One of the main themes of *The Bluest Eye* illuminates the major reason the community in the novel is miserable. The neighborhood is mainly black, bombarded by Eurocentric ideals of beauty and worth. Pecola believes she would be happy with blue baby doll eyes; desirable eyes that would make all her sadness and disappointments disappear.

Pecola's life is a constant struggle for psychological survival. At the end, being raped by her own father and becoming pregnant with his child breaks the girl's spirit and she escapes into insanity. Helping Pecola on the way to destruction is the town mystic Soaphead Church, who promises her blue eyes only she could see. At the end of the novel, Pecola's baby is stillborn, and she leads a totally isolated life with her mother who cannot even make herself look at her daughter. Cholly dies after leaving the family and Sammy escapes for the last time.

The problems of self-hatred and abandoned values in African-American community

remain acute concerns for Morrison. *The Bluest Eye* is her attempt to educate blacks on the hardships and dilemmas of their lives. As a narrator, Morrison does not judge any of the characters in her novel; she strives to understand even Cholly, Pauline and Soaphead Church. The author's emphasis on the political realities of black existence and the authentic African-American presentation connect her to the tradition of black aesthetic. In what follows, *The Bluest Eye*, its ideology and stylistic devices will be carefully analyzed, in order to arrive into satisfactory conclusion about the true significance of Morrison's text to the preservation of the African-American consciousness.

### III. Issues on Politics Manifested in the Novel

Considering *The Bluest Eye* as a black art literature, the novel's political themes need to be delved. The following sub-chapters illustrate how the issues of double-consciousness, racism, black feminism and black community structure present themselves in the text. Even though Morrison's narrative concentrates on the fate of Pecola, she uses the young black girl's story to encourage black political awareness. The author does not seek reconciliation with the white community, she aims to make the black community stronger in her narrative that finds political and personal empowerment in the increasing awareness of the problems in black communities.

Morrison gives way to different ideological dilemmas introduced in the black power and the black women's liberation movements. Her main concern is to illuminate how the adoption of white standards and ideals of beauty have corrupted black community. "From the black women liberation's point of view, *The Bluest Eye* is one of the first novels to have a little girl as the central character; Morrison also brings into consciousness the disturbing issue of rape" (Kubitschek 30). Her concern for African-American community is high; her special concern is for women and children whose position in the society is remarkably more vexing. Placing blacks' and the whites' cultural ideologies together, Morrison gets a background on which to examine the perseverance of the oppressed black experience.

Morrison fixes the political issues affecting her characters' lives into a narrative that concentrates on their individual tragedies. Culture and heritage have together always been considered of great importance in the African-American consciousness. Morrison portrays how white culture is embedding into black's world causing tension among people struggling for their unity and survival.

*The Bluest Eye* shows a clear picture of how black neighborhood is suffering the feeling of being powerless in front of the whites. The narrative is from Claudia's point of view, but the voice speaks of the oppression and difficulties of the whole black society. Claudia claims "since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (6). Analyzing the political background behind the text will shed light to the question why the tragedy in the novel happened, and how the novel promotes black empowerment in its themes.

### **Double-Consciousness**

The inability of the black characters to evaluate themselves as both black and American creates the biggest tragedy in the novel. The value structures of the dominant, white society contribute to the problem, making some of the characters disvalue their African-American heritage. The black community's existence becomes more complicated and drained when the dominant white society's value system clashes with black ideals and heritage. The dilemma was brought into general awareness through the black power movement, and was originally labeled "double-consciousness" by Du Bois. "In his influential 1903 critique *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes the problem: ' . . . an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn'" (Bloom 1). The confusion of double-consciousness remained a keen concern through the black empowerment movement. *The Bluest Eye* concentrates on addressing black community's desire to abandon its value system and adopt Eurocentric values of materialism, capitalist success and beauty, and how those desires remain unrealistic, destructive and unnecessary. The Breedloves embody the dilemma of double-consciousness by embracing the white society's ideals and losing sight of the value of their African-American heritage.

Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's parents, are examples of how difficult the



American dream of success is to reach for an African-American, especially in the 1940's. The couple is uneducated, ridiculed by the whites and denied an equal opportunity for work. "Cholly is employed as a young adult but becomes discouraged by Pauline, who is disappointed with him since he cannot provide her the luxury a white man would" (123). Cholly escapes into drinking while Pauline becomes the main breadwinner between the two. She works as a maid for a rich white family, growing addicted to the luxuries in their mansion. "No zinc tub, no buckets of stove-heated water, no flaky, stiff, grayish towels washed in a kitchen sink, dried in a dusty backyard, no tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb", Pauline thinks with delight. "Soon she stopped trying to keep her own house" (127). Cholly and Pauline cannot live with their double-consciousness. "They are discouraged by their inability to reach the white standards of desirable family structure, which included the financially secure male as the head of the family and the woman who tended the house" (Heinze 60). Blacks in the 1940's were denied the access to better paying jobs, making it necessary for both sexes to work for a meaningful survival of the family.

The frustrations of the Breedloves explode in frequent physical violence, the reasons of which reach much deeper than a mere domestic dispute. "No less did Cholly need her [Pauline]. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires" (42). Pauline despises Cholly for not being her savior, while Cholly hates Pauline because she is the manifestation of his unfulfilled opportunities in life.

The MacTeers are another black family living in the neighborhood. Describing their life, Morrison provides a meaningful contrast to the Breedloves. Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer both work hard to provide for their children, Claudia and Frieda. They work for the survival of their family,

even caring for Pecola when her own family is left without a home. Claudia's family represents Morrison's example of black ideologies' triumph over Eurocentric ideals. The MacTeers are able to balance their double-conscious minds. Instead of constant longing for the unreachable American dream like the Breedloves, the MacTeers embrace their community and their family values.

The main intension of The Black Power Movement was to inspire Blacks to concentrate on their heritage and identity more than confirming their position in the white society.

### **Racial and Individual Intolerance Inspiring Beauty in the Novel**

The main idea of *The Bluest Eye* is to portray how the white beauty standards have destroyed and rejected the worth of African-Americans' beauty. Morrison explores the manifestation of institutional racism and personal prejudice as one of the major concerns in the novel. Institutional racism is present in the lives of the characters via educational system, popular culture and production of items that only cater to the whites. Personal prejudice develops from being exposed to the racist institutions, and internalizing the majority's view of desirability. In *The Bluest Eye*, the community as a whole has accepted the Western values of beauty. That is why, Pecola always feels rejected, ugly and worthless. She wants to have blue eyes like that of the white girls in the society.

The novel begins with a preface from a children's reading assignment for school, called Dick and Jane reader. "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". Both Dick and Jane are white, blond and blue-eyed children. In the Dick and Jane reader, their happiness can be seen as linked to their whiteness. Immediately, a conflict rises between Dick and Jane, who are worth mentioning in a

schoolbook, and Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, poor black children who do not live in a static illusion of happiness. The school assignment of the preface is first written with proper punctuation and capitalization. Then it is repeated without capitalization or punctuation. Finally, the text is repeated for the second time, without any punctuation or spacing between the words. The preface gives an indication of the escalating confusion the characters in the novel will be experiencing as they are faced with racial oppression. Dick and Jane are creations of the white society that determines the material values and desirable appearance for everyone. The blacks do not have public representation in the society. There are no reading assignments about black children who live in poverty. This manifestation of institutional racism contributes to the characters' personal prejudices in the novel, increasing their insecurities and feelings of insecurity and ugliness.

Pecola is deeply affected by the illustrations of white beauty around her. Her home circumstances are miserable enough for her to reach for any kind of relief and acceptance available. She begins to dream about being beautiful and blue-eyed. When she goes to the MacTeers, she grows addicted to the children's Shirley Temple and ends up drinking three quarts of milk, just to be able to stare at Shirley's blue eyes and blond, curly hair. She even has long talks with Frieda about the wonderful, dreamy Shirley. Pecola also likes Mary Janes, candies that have a picture of a white, blond and blue-eyed girl. "To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (50). During her parents' violent outbursts, Pecola begins to internalize her wishes to be recognized as beautiful. "If she [Pecola] 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' (46). Pecola begins to pray and dream of blue eyes. In her limited experience, she

adopts the fallacy that her value depends on her looks.

Claudia, on the other hand, does not share the longing wishes for being white. Her exposure to the white standards of beauty has left her angry and somewhat confused. When she receives a white, blue-eyed baby doll for Christmas, she is revolted, rather than pleased:

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. (20)

Even as a 9-year-old, Claudia is able to make critical distinctions within her environment. She recognizes the institutional racism around her, even if she cannot name the problem. Claudia's observations become even more meaningful, when she thinks about Shirley Temple; the beautiful, white girl actress Pecola and Frieda adore. "I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (19). Claudia is angry because Bojangles is a black man, and he dances with Shirley in one of her movies, with the crowd around them cheering and smiling. Bojangles is one of Claudia's kind; therefore it is hard for her to understand why he chooses to dance with Shirley rather than herself. Claudia's anger, together with her healthier home life, saves her from living in an illusion like Pecola does.

Pecola has naivety and youth to defend her, but her mother Pauline is a grown woman destroyed by institutional racism. Pauline is a southern black woman who walks with a limp. After she moves to the north with her husband, Cholly, her sudden exposure to the white value system begins to burden her. Her foot becomes a symbol of unattainable beauty, together with

her lost front tooth. Pauline cannot relate to the northern blacks and she is not used to living among whites. Cholly grows distant and violent towards Pauline who escapes into the movies. The cinematic resort of Pauline's days begins to corrupt her value system. "Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another- physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind . . . and collected self-contempt by the heap" (122). Pauline and Cholly seem happy when they remain in the south. They face an alternate reality in the north. The culture and the people are different, and without any support from the community around them, their insecurities feed off of the trivial values of beauty and material success. The Breedloves come to believe they are unattractive and undesirable. "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" (39). Especially Pauline is continuously defeated by her surroundings, and she transfers her heritage of ugliness to her daughter, Pecola.

When Pauline looks at her firstborn, she seals Pecola's faith. "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (125). Pauline views herself as unattractive beyond doubt, and her influence on her daughter is extremely damaging. Both Pauline and Pecola's image of themselves comes from the outside; twisted by the society that promotes blue-eyed, white baby-dolls and beautiful white actresses on screen. Pauline's lack of emotions for Pecola is clearly depicted in the scene where her daughter helps her to wash laundry in the white mansion. Pauline, or Polly, as her white employers prefer to call her, has made a blueberry pie. Claudia, Frieda and the employers' little girl are in the kitchen when Pecola accidentally drops the pie on the floor. Polly arrives the scene and hits Pecola several times, knocking her on the

floor. When the little white girl begins to cry, Polly comforts her and ignores Pecola's pain. The black girls leave the scene: "As Pecola put the laundry bag in the wagon, we could hear Mrs. Breedlove hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink-and-yellow girl" (109). Pecola is defeated, whereas Claudia is infuriated by the fact that the white girl calls Pauline Polly, while even her own children always refer to her as Mrs. Breedlove. Pauline has developed a false sense of self-worth as Polly the perfect servant, and she guards her position fiercely. Pecola is black and ugly, the facts that Pauline wants to forget about herself. She denies Pecola's rights for love and caring, and her daughter internalizes her mother's sense of worthlessness and ugliness. "As long as she [Pecola] looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored and despised at school, by teachers and schoolmates alike" (45). Pecola wants to escape her oppressive home-life, yet her encounters in the larger community only enforce the disturbing messages of beauty and worth embedded into her consciousness by her mother.

The community in *The Bluest Eye* has adapted to the institutional racism they are exposed to, and has formed a black hierarchy based on skin color. The personal prejudice of Pecola's classmates and teachers is a drastic example of the decay of her environment. "Pecola is the only child who sits one at her desk. The teachers ask her questions very seldom, and the children at the schoolyard yell someone "loves Pecola Breedlove", if they want to insult each other" (45-6). The false standards of beauty manifest at the school, especially after Maureen Peal arrives. Maureen is a new, light-skinned student:

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone

her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. (62)

Maureen is not white; yet, she is light enough to be considered beautiful according to the Eurocentric standards, with her long, brown hair. Her beautiful clothes add to her attractiveness. Claudia and Frieda name her "Meringue Pie" (63), attempting to devalue her immense popularity at school. But when Maureen offers to walk home from school with Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, they accept. Pecola is fascinated and grateful when Maureen buys her ice cream. Afterwards, the girls begin to argue, and Maureen calls Claudia's father black and indicates that Pecola has seen her own father naked. Insulted by the lighter skinned girl, Claudia tries to hit Maureen, who escapes to the other side of the street. "Safe on the other side, she screamed at us, `I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute'" (73). Maureen knows their school and the whole community consider her beautiful. Even though the girls are young, the white society's standards have had a negative effect on them. They judge themselves by standards foreign to their heritage and fail to see their own beauty, since black beauty ideals are not represented in the society around them.

To be beautiful is to be light-skinned and rich. The ultimate happiness is whiteness and blue eyes. Morrison strongly attacks this self-image promoted by institutional racism and personal prejudice, showing it destroying the community's weakest members, especially Pecola. The physically and mentally abused black girl has no strength to face her reality; she escapes to the fantasy land of Dick and Jane, blond Shirley Temple and sweet Mary Jane. Even Pecola's own mother denies her the feeling of uniqueness, the look of love that would be only for her, for her own sake. Claudia is an exceptional child to see beyond the white images

enforced on them, yet she is too young to make a difference for her friend's self-esteem and meaningful survival as a black girl.

### **Racial Segregation Leading to Inferiority Complex**

Pecola wants her eyes to be blue because she thinks that pink skin and blue eyes manifest beauty, not her dark skin, black eyes and curly hair. This manifests how the 1960's slogan of black power movement "Black is beautiful" is uninternalised by the characters of *The Bluest Eyes*.

The community in the novel has developed a hierarchy of skin-color tones. The lighter the skin, the more respectable a person becomes. People victimize Pecola because she is very black. The destructiveness of colorism has affected her family, schoolmates and adults she encounters in her daily life. Whites and the lighter colored blacks claim a superior position, causing the dark blacks to hate and be ashamed of their color.

Heinze claims, "Morrison detests this manifestation of colorism in the black community to the extent of being convinced it prevents the healthy development of African-American community" (Heinze 21-2). Morrison's concern of colorism causing racial self-loathing is very adamant. She depicts several characters who are totally willing to abandon their "blackness" for being more accepted in the larger society.

Pecola cannot escape colorism around her. Her parents hate their skin color; her schoolmates have developed a "contempt for their own blackness" (65), which frequently erupts in aggression towards Pecola, the blackest of them all. Yet, the adults' treatment of Pecola is even more defeating for her, since they already have a superior position due to their age and maturity. When Pecola ventures into Mr. Yacobowski's general store, the white immigrant man doesn't even recognize her presence. "Yet this vacuum is not new to her . . . [Pecola thinks] . . .



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" (49). Mr. Yacobowski does not see Pecola because she is not worth seeing for him. When Pecola leaves the store with her purchase of Mary Jane candies in their blue-eyed, white girl wrapper, she feels ashamed and defeated. The older man has injured her self-perception and human worth. Symbolically, the white immigrant sells Pecola racial hatred, ignoring her and giving the poor black girl unattainable useless dreams through the white Mary Janes.

Another example of racial self-contempt and 'internalized racism in the community is Geraldine, Pecola's schoolmate Junior's mother. Geraldine is a light-skinned black and very particular about keeping her distance from the dark and poor blacks. She also makes sure her son does not associate with the common black children. "She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers . . . . Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (87). Geraldine has developed a hierarchy in her head; she wants to seem as "white" as possible. When Junior lures Pecola into his home and lies to his mother that the girl has injured Geraldine's precious black cat, the woman is infuriated. She has categorized Pecola as inferior, and does not appreciate the reminder of her own heritage. She negates the child in her hatred of her own ancestry. Geraldine knows where to place Pecola and her kind: "They lived on cold black-eyed peas and orange pop. Like flies they hovered; like flies they settled . . . `Get out', she said, her voice quiet. `You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house' (92). Pecola is too black to come to Geraldine's house; she is not worthy company for the well-dressed, yet vicious Junior. From an early age, the boy has learned his mother's value system and feels superior, whereas Pecola's mother and her surroundings continue to contribute to her self-loathing.

Pecola's final encounter on her road to destruction is Soaphead Church, the town mystic. When Pecola knocks on Soaphead's door, she is desperate. She is afraid of him, yet she thinks he is her only hope for survival. Soaphead feels that her request for blue eyes is very logical. "Of all the wishes people had brought him . . . this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes" (174). Soaphead decides to play God and use her naivety at the same time. He gives Pecola poisoned meat, to give to a dog he wants dead. If the dog acts in an odd manner afterwards, it will be Pecola's sign that her wish has come true. The dog dies and Pecola believes she now has blue eyes, visible only to her. Soaphead's superiority complex is revealed in his letter to God: "I did what You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her. I played You. And it was a very good show!" (182). Soaphead has been lost in his high education and light-skinned pride, to the extent of feeling justified to play God to a helpless black girl. When Pecola's baby is stillborn, she escapes into illusions and hallucinations, actually believing she has blue eyes. Mr. Yacobowski's eyes even refuse to recognize her presence; Geraldine and Junior look at her with loathing and superiority in their eyes. Even Soaphead Church damages her, because in his eyes Pecola is not a human being; he uses her as a tool to kill a dog and is willing to push her into insanity. Pecola is defeated, time and time again. Pecola's personality is not allowed to develop in her community and she cannot love herself, since no one inside the community loves her. Her eyes present the depth of her misery and the self-loathing of the whole community.

### **Black Feminist Concerns**

Patricia Hill Collins, a leading scholar in black feminist studies, claims, "black women can never become fully empowered in a context of social justice"(Collins 3).Morrison agrees

with Collins' statement, illustrating how the struggle in black women's life culminates in the inequality between the blacks and the whites, as opposed to inequality between men and women that was the main concern of the white feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's. The author pictures the harsh conditions of black women, without separating them from the oppressed situation of the whole minority. "Her novels illuminate "ethnic cultural feminism", concentrating distinctly on black feminist issues, rather than examining women's position in the society at large" (Denard 2). She also examines how the white society has affected the relationships between black men and women. In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly and Pauline's inability to reach the American dream of success creates pressure that releases as violence in their marriage. However, Morrison's particular concern in *The Bluest Eye* is the plight of black children, since the issues of society, community, neighborhood and families mold their susceptible personalities. "The author offers a realistic view of the characters, which has been applauded by black feminist critics, such as Barbara Christian and Mary Helen Washington" (Bell 242).

Another concern of the black women's liberation movement was how to analyze the black men and women's relationship with each other, simultaneously taking into consideration the affects of the dominating white culture on that union. Cholly and Pauline Breedloves' marriage is an example of how patriarchal struggles for domination affect black marriage. Cholly's relationships with Pauline and his daughter Pecola are both destroyed by his sense of powerlessness and his misguided attempts to gain power and control. At an early age, white men ridicule Cholly, when they find him trying to make love to a black girl, Darlene. The situation leaves Cholly defeated and angry, since he cannot defend himself against grown white men. He directs his hatred towards Darlene, "the one whom he had not

been able to protect, to spare, and to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight" (151). Cholly's love towards Pauline turns to hatred also, after he realizes he cannot make her happy or financially secure; he is an uneducated black man lacking a decent upbringing. Pauline grows to despise Cholly's drinking and unemployment: "Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross" (126-7).

Mrs. MacTeer is a strong character, managing work, poverty and her children with dedication and persistence. She is burdened by her responsibilities; yet, never chooses to give up. In a scene where Claudia is sick, her mother expresses her anger towards the child and the disease. Claudia recalls, however: "in the night, when my cough was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repined the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die" (12). Mrs. MacTeer's perseverance for her children is imminent; she would do anything for her family's survival and protection.

Similarly, little Claudia also displays great female insight and intelligence. She receives care at home and she matures to become an individual who genuinely cares for other people. Even as a child, Claudia sees beyond the racism and the prejudice in her community and in the white society as a whole. She tries to protect the weak, especially Pecola, refusing outside influences to alter her convictions. Claudia even wishes for Pecola's child's survival: "More strongly than my fondness of Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live - just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Pauls" (190).

Furthermore, the prostitutes upstairs the Breedloves' offer another female perspective. They do not need men; they use them. Miss Marie, China and Poland conduct their profession with humor, freedom and arrogance. "These women hated men, all men, without shame, apology,

or discrimination . . . . Black men, white men, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever-all were inadequate and weak" (56). The prostitutes steal money from their clients, and even occasionally beat them. They offer an opposing viewpoint on traditional depiction of prostitutes.

Morrison takes a stance for feminist writing by the choice of her main character, Pecola, a 12-year-old black girl. Pecola's destruction is a demonstration of patriarchal culture of domination, where adults think they are allowed to rule their children despotically. Morrison wants to show how deep children's experiences can be and how they can easily be destroyed by their surroundings. Claudia describes the experience of being a black girl in the world: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly into the major folds of the garment" (17).

The most delicate feminist issue Morrison highlights in her novel is rape. Pecola is raped by her father and her parents' reactions are juxtaposed with the MacTeers' reaction to a man assaulting Frieda. Cholly rapes Pecola out of drunkenness, desperation and anger. When Pecola tells Pauline what happened, she beats her. Cholly rapes Pecola again; still Pauline offers no support to her daughter. She does not save her from the father's destructive influence and violation; on the contrary, her hatred towards Pecola only intensifies. Frieda's parents have a totally different reaction, when their roomer, "Mr. Henry, violates Frieda by touching her breasts" (100). Frieda's mother begins to scream at Mr. Henry after she learns what has happened; her father throws a bicycle at the roomer and fires a gun at him. By their reaction to Frieda's traumatizing experience, the MacTeers verify her value as a human being and as a member of their family. The Breedloves, on the other hand, are not capable or willing to commit to the care of their children. They destroy Pecola, both physically and mentally, till she feels

without any human value.

The novel is fully stuffed with female experiences. Morrison visits several issues of the black women's liberation movement, concentrating her overall theme of white society affecting the black experience in a negative manner. She does not avoid the difficult subjects of rape and violent marital distress in her narrative. However, she balances Pecola's and Pauline's tragic experiences with positive female models of strength. Claudia's deep understanding of society at an early age promises hope for the African-American woman. Together with her mother Mrs. MacTeer, Claudia portrays strength of character, abandonment of Eurocentric values and perseverance crucial to the survival of the whole black culture.

### **Communal Degradation**

In Morrison's Lorain, Ohio, the community has lost its purpose. With the exception of the MacTeers, *The Bluest Eye's* characters actively abandon the African values of communal caring, importance of family and reliance to heritage. Morrison uses the neighborhood in *The Bluest Eye* as a warning of the possible destruction of the African-American community. The neighborhood of the novel does not care enough to save its weakest members, and most of the characters are mainly concerned about their individual well-being. The Breedloves, especially Pecola, are easy targets of the community's wrath and it's despised of black people.

The black power movement's ideals of the internally strong and unified African-American community are dead in Morrison's novel. In her fiction, the blacks have been deprived of the ability to portray a public self-image, which in turn has made them accept their role as oppressed objects in the society. The black community is continually devalued by the Eurocentric values. They do not see blacks on the billboards, movies or schoolbooks, as if the society as a whole did not even recognize their existence. Blacks seem to have the wrong skin

color for success in life; they are uneducated, poor and void of deep emotions.

The whites' bias towards the blacks can be clearly detected when Pauline goes to the hospital to give birth to Pecola. The doctor and his interns come to examine Pauline, and converse with each other. "When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (124-5). Pauline is left stunned by the doctor's words. Nevertheless, with the combination of all the Western influences in life, she accepts the imposed view of herself. Pecola also accepts her position as a victim in the community. She does not defend herself against her abusive schoolmates. She stays quiet when Junior lies to his mother that she has injured Geraldine's precious cat. The community further damages Pecola, because it has internalized its worthlessness as a pariah in the larger society.

According to Thomas March, "Morrison's novels offer interplay between an individual and the communities around him. The members of the community are molded by their surround culture; whereas the community relies on the same people for its own existence" (March 41). Pecola's community is effortless and defeated. The Eurocentric models of living have replaced whatever was meaningful before. Foreign standards of beauty, worth and success have permeated people's minds. The altered standards can be easily seen in the scene where Claudia wishes for a traditional experience for Christmas, instead of a cold, white and blue-eyed baby doll. "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.' The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterwards" (22). Instead of something familiar and valuable, Claudia is given a gift that represents foreign culture and

values. She is not given a chance to express her ethnicity and love for tradition and familiarity. The society at large has so influenced Claudia's parents and her whole community that they honestly think white baby doll is something more valuable than a pleasant evening in grandmother's kitchen. This is where *The Bluest Eye* signifies the failure of its community.

Morrison's black community is especially harsh towards its weakest members, the Breedloves. Interestingly enough, they live in an abandoned store with a large window facing the street. Symbolically, it would seem impossible for the neighborhood to ignore the display of human suffering Pauline, Cholly and Pecola present. Yet, no one cares. No helping hands are offered even after Cholly rapes his own daughter, Pecola. "The neighborhood's reaction is mean gossip about the Breedloves and their flaws" (189). There are even suggestions that Pecola brought the rape upon herself; she did something to provoke her father. The MacTeer girls are the only members of the community who have compassion for Pecola. They present a slight chance of hope for the novel's lost community. The neighborhood that judges without helping even an innocent, abused child is bound to fail. At the end of the novel, Cholly is dead and Pecola lives at the edge of town with her mother. Morrison illustrates the Breedloves' destruction skillfully; binding it together with the decay of the community around them. Especially Pecola's defeat crushes the community because she is an innocent child who is robbed of her life.

Claudia's depiction of Pecola's destruction in the failing community is poignant:

All of us - all who knew her - felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us; her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us believe we were eloquent . . . . Even her waking dreams we used - to silence our own nightmares (205).



“The white society is destroying the black community; therefore the blacks are driven to attack the Breedloves. Morrison criticizes the community for failing to protect Pecola's existence and instead trying to be as white as possible” (Heinze 69).

At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, suffering and carelessness leave the black community without answers or direction. “Morrison states herself: ‘I write about the things I don't have any resolutions for’” (Tate 130), she does not offer much hope for the town as it is described in the novel. The last lines of the novel echo the total destruction of both the community and Pecola, as the people see her digging in the trash at the edge of town. Claudia laments: "We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my to, it's much, much, much too late" (206). The majority of the people in *The Bluest Eye* have lost connection to their heritage, their humanity and their willingness to collectively care about their surroundings. They do not interfere with their neighbors' suffering; they do not challenge the racist and oppressive value system forced on them by the white society. Morrison's characters and her community have internalized their position as objects in life and they feel too burdened to break free.

Through the examples of perseverance and caring by the MacTeers, Morrison asks the community and the individuals in it to try their hardest to improve the quality of their lives. She underlines the importance of finding strength from within the community, rather than looking outside for answers. She does not solely blame the black pariah community for its decay; she includes the society as a whole in the circle of responsibility. She does not have the answers to improve the society's situation and for Pecola every effort is already too late. But she wishes that somewhere in the world there were enough people like Claudia, who are aware of the destruction of society and who spread the awareness of the conditions of the oppressed and the violated.

Those individuals seem to be her only hope. Through her writing, Morrison displays her willingness to preserve the African-American community; she does not wish the basic, good values of old black communities to be totally forgotten in the whirlwind called Western civilization.

#### IV. Stylistic and Structural Devices

Influential black aesthetic critics, such as Houston A. Baker Jr., Addison Gayle Jr., and Stephen Henderson, brought new attention to the "language of the text" in African-American literary criticism in the 1960's and 1970's (Gates XXVIII). Not only was the political message of the black arts significant, but also the manner in which the message was delivered could forward black empowerment. In the following sub-chapters, some of *The Bluest Eye's* stylistic and structural emphases will be illustrated, in order to show how Morrison's choices of literary presentation strengthen her connection to the black arts.

The black arts movement was adamant about abandoning the white models of aesthetic norm. Producing art for the black, the African-American aesthetic concentrated on representing black experience and presenting a unique culture. Morrison aims to write novels using language that is free of oppressive politics of white culture. Her message is ideological and her presentation is geared towards blacks. She wants to educate and share awareness in her writing style, finding it crucial to use black styles of presentation in her work. Like a true preserver of culture, she does not allow African-American tradition to be forgotten.

True to the influences of the black arts movement, Morrison's style is characteristically African-American. She thrives to use stylistic devices that derive from her ancestry and heritage. The call-and-response style of narrative she utilizes dates back to the era when the slaves were not allowed to be educated and the only way for them to transfer knowledge was by storytelling and singing. Morrison also uses specifically black dialects when her black characters converse with each other. She does not make an effort to explain the language or her narrative methods to anyone outside the black community. Her powerful style and language invite to study her novels from various angles, beyond the ideological message she displays. The message is made stronger

and deeper by her exploration of the African-American style in her narrative. Even though the content of her novels clarifies the condition of the whole society, the nuances in her writing can be seen in the specific portrayal of individual search and suffering. Morrison wants to illustrate the beauty of life, even through hardship. The more painful her character's situation, the more poetic and expressive her writing becomes, making the text more approachable. The author's style brings a feeling of hope to the characters' harsh situations. Her style narrates a world beyond her message, a world rich with African-American culture, even if that presentation is forbidden in the concrete framework of the reality of her characters.

### **Storytelling Tradition**

Morrison uses black storytelling traditions as a major narrative technique to authenticate African-American experience in her novel. The reader feels closely involved in the story of *The Bluest Eye* as if the reader has personally witnessed the tragedy. Morrison herself can be thus called a skilful storyteller. The call-and-response style of communication initiated from the time of slavery is used in the novel.

The style originally developed among slaves, as a single caller, or a singer began a story and the listening community responded and agreed vocally to the narrative. Blacks were not taught to read or write during slavery; they were denied any artistic way of presenting themselves. The slaves took singing and storytelling as a crucial opportunity to forward their information and culture besides taking it as a mere way of entertainment. Morrison gives voice to several forbidden issues of oppression using the methods of storytelling on many levels in her narrative. This also draws the reader into the story more intimately, as the non-chronological revealing of Pecola's story, and the alternating focus on different characters has one paying attention, participating and reacting to the novel. The feeling of intimacy Morrison

aims to convey in her writing resembles African-American storytelling, where the caller and the audience formed one, communicating unit.

“Marilyn Sanders Mobley illustrates three significant functions of the African-American storytelling tradition that can be identified in Morrison's narratives” (Mobley 14). First, stories were told to affirm the identity of the oppressed. Secondly, they conveyed information to people who were denied knowledge and schooling. Last, and perhaps most importantly, storytelling provided an opportunity to reconcile with the past and the feeling of being a part of a coherent and unified community. Pecola’s identity is completely lost in her society as she is black, a female, and on top of that a helpless child. Her parents Pauline and Cholly Breedlove are identified as unfit parents and at the same time, people whose potential goodness is all destroyed and suppressed by the society. Morrison, through every single character in *The Bluest Eye*, awares the readers about the tragedy of the African-American community as a whole and the suppressed reasons of their struggle. For Morrison, the final reconciliation with the past means not forgetting about even the most painful chapters in black experience. Therefore, Morrison brings forth Pecola's story, in order for the black community to recognize the problems in its midst and gain new awareness of the past that affects their present.

Morrison intends to present more to the readers than simply the functions of storytelling thing. The narration in the novel moves the reader directly into the story, being a part of it, unfolding the pathetic story of Pecola Breedlove. Claudia, a young black girl, narrates the book retrospectively. The characters- Pecola, Pauline, Claudia and Soaphead Church each have their respective sections in the book that inform the reader about their thoughts and development.

Morrison uses this change in her narrative focus as a resource to widen the perspective of the book. To provide only the perspective of the young girls would be a rather limited

approach. By giving space for narrating each of the major characters in her novel, Morrison gives the reader a chance to understand the whole reason for Pecola's destruction. Morrison focuses on the suffering of not only a black individual, but the black community and the society as a whole. Her narrative prevents the reader from drawing a quick, factual conclusion or judgment about what happens in the novel. At the end, one is exposed to a multitude of personal narratives that demand fuller understanding and participation.

One of the remarkable styles she has used together with the story-telling is the timeline. The timeline is not chronological, but it helps one discover what has happened.

*The Bluest Eye's* chapters are not constructed along a logical timeline. For example, following the chapter about Pecola helping her mother with the wash is a chapter illustrating Pauline's younger years. A chapter telling Cholly's story that culminates in him raping Pecola follows Pauline's chapter. Because of this non-chronological timeline, one piece at a time, the reader is puzzled, yet the reader is at the end able to construct the story for her/himself. At the beginning of the novel itself, she has offered what has already happened. At the end of the story, the reader understands how and why that has happened. "Like a genuine storytelling event, Morrison's narrative illustrates how the narrator, story and the audience are never in a static situation; each element is transformed during the reading experience" (Mobley 14). In Morrison's narrating each character steps in turn into the story and voice their history and circumstances that is responsible for what they are.

The values lost in the story of the book are reinforced in the style it is written. The black storytelling style that includes reciprocal manner of narration illustrates the importance Morrison places on the preservation of distinctively black culture and heritage. "The reader has to participate in the story and be changed by it. Morrison closes the distancing gap between the

author and the audience by challenging the reader's cultural views and moral standing" (Harris 170). The intimate storytelling in Pecola's story thrives to affirm African-American experience.

### **Black English in Narration**

Morrison proudly places herself among the authors of the black arts movement by using distinctively black spoken dialect in her narrative. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison displays the deep and complex nuances of black American spoken language. She tries to emphasize the often devalued dialects. She brings together the sections with colloquial conversations and the standard writings to bring the variation and life to the make. This has made the text authentic and personal at the same time. Her characters echo the peculiarly black, yet oral traditions in their dialogues, not deviating from the realistic sounding language.

When Pecola drops a pie at her mother's work place, Pauline strikes her down. Even her words towards her daughter are described as an assault. "Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you . . . work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor" (109). Morrison catches Pauline's obvious rage over the situation; at the same time she demonstrates that Pauline has nothing constructive to offer her daughter. Pauline, as well as the other adults Pecola tries to associate with, does not speak to her directly. They rather ignore her or "talk over and around her, which, in the Black English oral tradition, signifies her `otherness" (Atkinson 17). Atkinson examines this otherness by analyzing how the three prostitutes speak in Pecola's presence. "Oh, Lord. How that man loved me!" Marie exclaimed. "China arranged a fingerful of hair into a bang effect. `Then why he left you to sell tail? Girl, when I found out I could sell it - that somebody would pay cold cash for it, you could have knocked me over with a feather'. Poland began to laugh, soundlessly." (55) Pecola goes to the prostitutes and listens to their experiences while they talk to each other as an outsider. A

child who was supposed to develop knowledge and education in her was thus being a social failure.

In addition to utilizing African-American signifying acts in discourse, Morrison aims to preserve the full nuances and the distinctive rhythm of black dialects. Her lively language is detected in the sharp rivalry among children in the playground "'You want a fat lip?' Bay Boy drew back his fist at me. 'Yeah, Gimme one of yours. You gone get o n e'" (66). The confrontational tone and perseverance are imminent in the children's arguing. Morrison also uses colloquial expressions to make her narrative real and convincing. Pauline's memories of Cholly and her youth are another example of the author's use of black dialect: "So when Cholly come up and tickled my foot, it was like them berries, that lemonade, them streaks of green the June bugs made, all come together. . . . He used to whistle, and when I heard him, shivers come to my skin" (115). Morrison records black experiences that always denied a written presentation in her works. African-American vocabulary and natural flow of speech is conserved in her writing.

Morrison conducts her dialogues with care. Her authentic way of writing a conversation is represented in the scene where the townswomen talk about MacTeers' new roomer, Mr. Henry, "'Well, Henry ain't no chicken.' 'No, but he ain't no buzzard, either.' 'He ever been married to anybody'? . . . 'How come? Somebody cut it off?'" (14). Even more enchanting than the conversation itself, is Claudia's description of the quality and nuances of the exchange. "Their conversation is like a gently wicked dance: sound meets sound, curtsies, shimmies, and retires. Another sound enters but is upstaged by still another: the two circle each other and stop" (15). Like a typical black, she enjoys the distinctive style she uses in the dialogues and conversations.

During slavery, they were not allowed to be educated and their artistic means of



expression were very limited. Thus, the distinctive language remains a powerful illustrator of the survival of the whole culture. Morrison wants to make her contribution to the preservation of distinctively black language and dialogue. She utilizes various structures of the African-American oral tradition, from illustrating signifying acts to creating a poignant argument at black children's playground. Morrison wants the spoken dialect of Black English to be highlighted affirming to the African-American cultural tradition.

### **Poetic Realism and Gothic Fable**

“Morrison uses an amazing combination of lyrical language and grotesque situations. Bell defines her writing as ‘poetic realism’ and ‘gothic fable’” (Bell 269). He clarifies how black poetic realists, such as Morrison and Jean Toomer, concentrate on the internal turmoil of their characters, rather than focusing on describing the structures of society. What makes Morrison's writing gothic for Bell is: “her style that presents a typically brief, lyrical narrative that concentrates on exploring the beauty of life through its tragedies and magic” (Bell 270). Morrison's depiction of her character's personal experiences through the presentation of both the aesthetic and the disturbing aspects of life makes her all the more a genuine black artist. In slavery and well into the era after emancipation, the blacks were not allowed to influence the public life; therefore, it becomes immensely significant to portray their thoughts and reactions in their reality limited by white oppression. The gothic novel presents "the corruption produced by the dominant ideology as all-pervasive: every person and every place is infected by the poison of patriarchal, racist, or classist discourse" (Winter 53). Morrison uses a multidimensional style to explore both the poetry and the ugliness of life.

Using poetic imagery (language that aims to produce sensory images) as her device, Morrison narrates *The Bluest Eye* by concentrating on experiences black children have in their

suffering community. She thrives for a lyrical and artistic representation of their reality. Morrison, in her interview with Bessie W Jones and Audrey L. Vinson has said, "Oh yes, the image, the pictures, for me - it's what holds it. I can't move along in a chapter or part unless I can see the single thing that makes it clear - almost like a painting" (Jones and Vinson 135). For example, Morrison's poetic realism can be seen in her usage of assonance (repeating vowel sounds) and imagery in her eloquent description of the boys who attack Pecola after school:

They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds - cooled - and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit (65).

Both Morrison's usage of assonance and imagery can be detected in her word choices, such as "cone of scorn" and "spilled over lips". Her description flows like a dance; it is vivid like a painting. Morrison captures the desperation and the survival tactics of the black children in the imagery of an erupting volcano. The children's anger is unstoppable and evitable; it flows like lava and buries everything good in its path. Morrison concentrates on the boys' personal dilemmas, rather than explaining the communal structures that created them. Her narrative implies that consciousness molds reality - not vice versa. Morrison expresses her experiences and feelings in a very realistic way. She leaves the reader no chance to ignore the African-American suffering any longer.

Morrison concludes the novel with a poetic love. Rather than communal love for humanity, she describes the love that has debilitated the characters in her novel. In the following

example, the author uses imagery and repetition as her poetic devices:

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

The passage unfolds like a tragic love sonnet that has endured the test of times, making it is extremely relevant to human experience. Morrison stresses the emotional world of her characters because their feelings and psychological processes are in many cases even more enduring than the structures of society.

The lyrical representation in Morrison's narratives is counterbalanced by her infatuation with the gothic and the tragic circumstances in life. Gothic literature is "fascinated by objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic" (Boning 3). Morrison admits her writing is often terrifying, yet she also sees "life affirming" qualities that present themselves through the text. Her gothic fables seek the fascinating in the middle of sickness, violence and oppression. *The Bluest Eye* relishes on aestheticizing even the incestuous rape of Pecola; it pictures beauty as an inseparable part of traumatic events. Cholly's thoughts at the time of his terrible act speak of tenderness: "The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth" (162). Young Claudia's perceptiveness point out Morrison's usage of the gothic style. She focuses the beauty in the grotesque and love misplaced in violence. She

wants to illuminate the beauty in the grotesque and the misplaced love in violence.

Morrison transfers Pecola's pathetic character into beauty; much in the same way she beautifies the circumstances of Cholly's criminal actions. "Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach - could not even see - but which filled the valleys of the mind" (204). The description of Pecola in her insanity and hopelessness is a significant example of how Morrison uses her poetic style in her gothic fables. Pecola is defeated; her mind and body have been violated to the point where she cannot find a way around sanity. She is ridiculed and abandoned by the whole community in the most inhumane manner.

The relatively brief narrative of *The Bluest Eye* is continuously enriched by Morrison's poetic realism. She concentrates on describing her characters' thoughts by writing carefully crafted, lyrical prose. "The poetic elements of her text are inseparable from the gothic tale her characters materialize in. The author purposefully places her characters in horrible situations to find out their strengths and weaknesses" (Jones and Vinson 141). The novel, as it's fullest, is an exploration to the minds of the oppressed; the people whose condition has remained unnoticed during the decades of racism and humiliation. Her narrative combines the horror and the beauty of life, making her subject matter more influential and accessible.

### V. A Qualified Black Political Literature

In order to bring out Black's aesthetics in Morrison's text, one has to realize the relationship between her message and style. Her multi-layered narrative in *The Bluest Eye* brings the reader to epiphanies well beyond understanding the base story of the 12-year-old Pecola who escapes into insanity. The basis of the text is a fight to re-establish African-American culture's identity and ideological strength. bell hooks, an African-American professor and scholarly writer, narrates concerns similar to Morrison's. In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks claims; "It is the telling of our history that enables political self recovery" (hooks 176). She further stresses that modern society has become so diversified and pluralistic it denies racism and 'inequality. Morrison does not avoid even the most difficult issues of race, whether it is personal suffering caused by the pressure of white culture or the decay of the whole community.

The perseverance of black culture is realized at the end of the *The Bluest Eye* when Claudia internalizes the beauty of her own heritage as she imagines Pecola's unborn child:

I thought about the baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great 0's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. (190)

Claudia's narrative brings together the essential gradients that form Morrison's ideological aesthetic. It tells a story of a culture not appreciating its beauty and worth, a culture bombarded with plastic images of Eurocentric desirability. At the same time, the text presents familiar and lovable black images that have been carefully crafted within the lyrical presentation

story. Morrison promises beauty in suffering and hope in the deepest misery. Her message cannot be separated from her presentation since they form a seamless, unbreakable circle with no beginning nor end.

From the beginning of my thesis I aimed to illustrate the style enforcing the subject matter of her work. The concepts of the black empowerment movements provided a fruitful background for a thorough analysis of her text. I aimed to present a systematic study of the various ways Morrison fights for the survival of the African-American culture in her narrative. At the end, the results of such a study offer a multidimensional world, presenting a view reaching way beyond the base story of the novel.

Ideologically, the black aesthetic movement offered the most informative starting point that tied all the different threads of my study together. Since the ideology brings forth a natural bridge between arts and politics, my choice for including an extensive section about the political ideologies began to feel even more essential to the analysis. Whatever direction I took my study, no matter whether in the realm of Morrison's political message or her style, the increasing understanding of the continuous and systematic synthesis of the two elements provided the core to my findings.

Since Morrison's first novel is not only very politically inclined, but also immensely personal, I found it fundamental to provide multiple quotations by the author herself. Fortunately, several interviews and speeches by Morrison have been published, and these added resources bring further balance to the analysis of her work. *The Bluest Eye* derives from a real experience in the past; therefore I also wanted to further explore what the author had to say personally about the political structures and stylistic choices beyond the basic story of her novel.

Even though this thesis concentrates on only one of Morrison's nine novels, similar

glimpses of ideological concerns and stylistic choices can be detected throughout the author's whole literary output. Heine states that each of her works in progression is an increasingly bold and original revoicing of previous concerns. For example *Sula*, Morrison's second novel, continues to voice the author's concerns for women's position in the society and dynamics in African-American community. She also continuously revisits the problems and changes Eurocentric culture brings to the realities of black people. The timeline of her novels varies from the 1800's to the present day. However, her consistent variation on similar subject matter and style remind one of the cyclical realizations of time in black culture. No matter how diverse and modernized the current society, Morrison reminds her readers of the undeniable fact that a meaningful future can only be build on the foundation of past experiences and cultural heritage.

*The Bluest Eye* marks the beginning of Morrison's journey to black empowerment. It is the beginning of a multi-dimensional and holistic portrayal of the African-American experience, past and present. In the course of the thesis, various political concerns and writing techniques were discussed in separate analysis. Remarkably, the seemingly different topics continuously blend into one; much in the similar manner Morrison's characters in the novel are an inseparable part of the larger communal and societal fabric. The author's attempt to produce text that is simultaneously thought provoking, socially meaningful and yet, undeniably beautiful, is realized in *The Bluest Eye*. Thomas March illuminates Morrison's central point in the novel, stating: "The world of Morrison's fiction is one that seeks to fill in the emotional and human history of African America in its own right - neither whitewashed nor separate, but a narrative that restores to the concept of 'African-American' the full range of human experience" (Bloom 40). This continuous attempt that presents itself on multiple levels

in *The Bluest Eye*, qualifies Morrison's novel as black arts literature.

Conner rightfully claims, “To analyze Morrison's style without bringing attention to her message, or vice versa, would have only produced a flat and one-sided study” (Conner x). Therefore, when both the subjects are brought together in the same study, one has a clearer understanding of the author's attempt to write prose that is "indisputably black" (Morrison 211). Beauty, horror, politics and cultural values form an inseparable whole in *The Bluest Eye*, forming an intriguing synthesis of black aesthetic ideology.