PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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Racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation

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Academic Year: 2024/2025

Dedications

I dedicate my work to my dear parents, whose endless love, prayers, and sacrifices have been my foundation, I owe everything. To my beloved husband, for his constant support, encouragement, and understanding, and to my little daughter, the light of my life, whose smile gave me the motivation to keep going. To everyone who stood by me and believed in my abilities. This work is dedicated to you with all my love

Acknowledgements

I thank ALLAH always and forever for giving me the patience to complete my master's dissertation.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Assia BENFODDA, for her guidance, insightful feedback, and encouragement during the course of this research.

My Sincere gratitude goes to the jury members, Mrs. Hasna KERSANI and Mrs. Rayhane HOUARI, for their valuable time in reviewing this research work.

My appreciation extends to my teachers and everyone who believed in me and stood by me during this academic journey.

Abstract

This thesis examines the presentation of racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* focusing on how internalised, interpersonal, institutional and structural forms of racism intersect to shape identity and self-perception. Set in mid 20th century Ohio, Morrison's narrative exposes the destructive power of Eurocentric beauty standards, revealing whiteness as both a social and psychological weapon. Drawing on critical race theory, postcolonial thought, and historical analyses, this study situates the novel within the legacy of slavery and the cultural construction of whiteness. Through close textual analyses, it explores how systemic oppression infiltrates everyday interactions, fractures Black selfhood , and perpetuates cycles of exclusion and self-loathing. Ultimately, this work argues that *The Bluest Eye* functions not only as a poignant literary portrayal of a young girl's tragedy but also as a profound critique of the enduring racial ideologies that continue to shape beauty, belonging, and humanity in American society.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, Racism, Beauty Standards, Whiteness, Racial Identity.

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General Introduction

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is a seminal work of African American literature that interrogates the devastating effects of racism, colourism, and white beauty standards on black identity and self-perception. Set in Lorain, Ohio, during the years immediately following the great depression, the novel offers an intimate and devastating portrayal of a young Black girl, Pecola Breedlove, whose yearning for blue eyes becomes a tragic metaphor for the internalised racism embedded in American society. Through Morrison's layered narrative and shifting perspectives, *The Bluest Eye* exposes the interconnected forces of structural oppression, interpersonal prejudice, and psychological trauma, revealing how they intersect to deform both individual lives and collective cultural identities.

While the novel unfolds within the everyday experiences of an African American community in mid 20th century America, its roots extend deep into the racial hierarchies established centuries earlier. The legacy of slavery, the codification of racial differences, and the construction of whiteness as the normative ideal have profoundly shaped American cultural values. By the 19th century, these ideas were embedded not only in law and politics but also in the nation's artistic, literary, and scientific discourses. Beauty itself became racialised, with pale skin, straight hair, delicate facial features, and thinness upheld as markers of refinement, morality and civilisation. As scholars such as Sabrina Strings and Richard Dyer have argued, these ideals were not innocuous; they were instruments of exclusion designed to position whiteness as the ultimate standard while denigrating Blackness as the antithesis of beauty and virtue. Morrison's novel brings these historical forces into the realm of the personal, showing their intimate violence on the minds and bodies of her characters.

In this sense, *The Bluest Eye* is as much a work of social history as it is a work of fiction. It reflects the complex interplay between systemic racism and the lived experiences of African Americans in a racially stratified society. Racism in the novel does not manifest solely through overt acts of discrimination; rather, it permeates the very structures and norms of the

community, shaping interactions, opportunities, and self-worth. Structural racism, rooted in institutional policies and cultural narratives, dictates whose beauty, humanity, and dignity are recognised. Interpersonal racism reinforces these hierarchies through everyday encounters laden with prejudice, humiliation, or exclusion. At the same time, Morrison illustrates the corrosive nature of internalised racism, showing how the acceptance of white supremacy's value system leads to self-loathing and fragmentation of identity.

The focus of this dissertation, Racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, is to analyse these multiple dimensions of racism, situating Morrison's novel within its historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on postcolonial theory, critical race studies, cultural theory, and historical scholarship. Thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Bell Hooks, Stuart Hall, and others provide a theoretical lens for reading Morrison's portrayal of identity formation in a racialised society and the structuring power of beauty standards rooted in whiteness. Historical sources on 19th century American racial ideology, as well as contemporary analyses of media and beauty culture, help to bridge the gap between Morrison's fictional world and the material realities it represents.

By moving between theory, history, and close textual analysis, this dissertation seeks to illuminate how *The Bluest Eye* functions as both a product of its historical moment and a timeless commentary on the enduring structures of racial oppression. Morrison's work challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable truths about the cultural systems they inhabit, truths about who is allowed to be beautiful, who is allowed to be human, and who bears the cost of these definitions. In a society where the politics of beauty and race remain deeply intertwined, *The Bluest Eye* continues to resonate, urging an unflinching examination of the ideals that shape our perceptions and the power structures they uphold.

Published in 1970, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is both a narrative of one girl's destruction and a broader social critique of American literature. Set in Lorain, Ohio, during the 1940s, the novel follows Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl who comes to believe that blue eyes will grant her beauty, love, and acceptance. Her tragic descent into madness after experiences of neglect, poverty, and sexual violence illustrates how racism and colourism do not simply exist in public institutions but penetrate private lives, shaping the most intimate aspects of selfhood. Morrison exposes how a community's silence, prejudice, and failures contribute to Pecola's downfall.

The significance of *The Bluest Eye* lies in its ground-breaking confrontation with the cultural politics of beauty and the construction of whiteness. Morrison challenges dominant narratives that equate beauty with white features, revealing how these ideals operate as tools of psychological domination. Pecola's longing for blue eyes is not just a child's fantasy but a symbol of how racism teaches Black girls to internalise self-hatred. The novel interrogates the complicity of both white society and Black communities in perpetuating harmful ideals, and insists on the urgency of redefining beauty beyond Eurocentric norms.

As Morrison debuted, *The Bluest Eye* inaugurated a literary career devoted to re-centring Black voices, memory, and history. Its continued relevance in discussions of race and gender underscores its role as a foundational text in African American literature and a powerful critique of the cultural structures that sustain inequality.

The primary objective of the study, is to examine how Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* reveals the destructive impact of racism and white beauty standards on the formation of identity within African American communities, the novel focuses on Pecola Breedlove's tragic longing for blue eyes, the research seeks to uncover the psychological violence that results when individuals internalise dominant beauty norms that exclude and devalue Blackness.

Another key objective of the study is to analyse the manner in which Morrison illustrates the trickling down of structural racism into the intimate spaces of family and community, showing how broader historical forces translate into everyday suffering and fractured relationships. In doing so, the research also interrogates the construction of whiteness as a cultural ideal, drawing on the insights of theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Bell Hooks, Richard Dyer, and Sabrina Strings to contextualise Morrison's critique within broader intellectual debates about race, power, and representation.

Finally, this study aims to highlight Morrison's use of storytelling as an act of testimony. By giving voice to the silenced experiences of Black childhood, she also calls for a reimagining of beauty and identity beyond Eurocentric standards. Through this exploration, the research hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersections between race, gender, and cultural ideas, while situating *The Bluest Eye* as a foundation text in both African American literature and the study of whiteness.

This study is guided by key research questions that address the relationship between racism, beauty standards, and the construction of whiteness in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. At the heart of the inquiry is the question of how Morrison portrays the destructive power of Eurocentric beauty ideals and their impact on the identity and self-worth of African American characters. The research also explores how externally imposed standards of beauty infiltrate the intimate sphere of the family and community, influencing psychological development and interpersonal relationships.

Another crucial question concerns the cultural construction of whiteness: in what ways does the novel reveal whiteness not as a neutral category, but as a historically produced ideal that operates through exclusion, domination, and desirability? Ultimately, these research

questions aim to illuminate how *The Bluest Eye* critiques the intersections of race, gender, and beauty, and how the novel contributes to ongoing conversations about the psychological and cultural consequences of systemic racism in American society.

This study tests the hypothesis that Eurocentric beauty standards, as represented in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, function as mechanisms of psychological violence that lead to self-hatred, fractured identities, and the devaluation of Blackness. It assumes that Pecola Breedlove's tragic fate is not an isolated incident but a symbolic reflection of how racism and the cultural construction of whiteness infiltrate personal and communal spaces.

Another hypothesis guiding this research is that whiteness, far from being a neutral or invisible category, operates as an exclusionary and normative construct that sets the standards of beauty, worth, and belonging in American society. Morrison's novel demonstrates how this construct becomes internalised by both individuals and communities, thereby perpetuating cycles of oppression.

Finally, this study hypothesises that Morrison employs storytelling as an act of testimony and resistance, exposing the hidden histories of Black suffering while simultaneously challenging dominant cultural narratives. In this sense, *The Bluest Eye* is not merely a novel about a young girl's downfall; it is also a critical text that unsettles the ideological foundations of whiteness and reclaims space for alternative visions of beauty and identity.

Therefore, this dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter establishes the conceptual foundation of the study. It begins by defining racism in its various forms: interpersonal, internalised, institutional and structural. It then explores how these operate within both historical and literary contexts. Drawing on key theorists, this chapter also examines the role of beauty standards and whiteness in sustaining racial hierarchies, thereby

laying the groundwork for understanding the novel's thematic concerns. The second chapter shifts focus to the historical background of 19th century America, tracing the emergence of racialised beauty ideals, the intensification of racial tension, and the influence of social reform movements. This historical frame is essential for understanding the cultural inheritance that shapes the world of *The Bluest Eye*.

Chapter three turns directly to the novel, analysing how Morrison depicts the different types of racism at work in her characters' lives and how these forms of oppression affect their sense of self. This includes a detailed examination of structural racism in the institutions and norms that shape the community, interpersonal racism in the interactions between characters, and internalised racism as manifested in Pecola's longing for blue eyes. The chapter also investigates how these forces interact to produce compounded forms of marginalisation, particularly for Black women and girls.

The final chapter approaches *The Bluest Eye* as a symbolic text, exploring Pecola's obsession with whiteness as both personal tragedy and a broader commentary on American racial ideology. It examines how Morrison uses symbolism, narrative structure, and character development to critique the dominance of Eurocentric beauty ideals. Furthermore, it considers the possibility of moving beyond internalised racism through cultural reclamation, resistance, and an alternative vision of beauty and identity

Chapter One

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The concept of race has long been central to the social, political and cultural organisation of modern societies. Far from being a neutral descriptor of human differences, race operates as a constructed category used to classify and control populations. Within this racialised framework, identity is not shaped in isolation but develops through a continuous negotiation between self-perception and societal expectations. For marginalised communities, particularly African Americans, identity formation has been profoundly shaped by the persistent devaluation of Blackness alongside the simultaneous idealisation of whiteness. The historical legacy of slavery, segregation, and discriminatory policies has reinforced a hierarchy in which whiteness operates both as a form of advantage and as an aesthetic norm.

Beauty standards play a critical role in maintaining this racial hierarchy. They extend beyond questions of appearances, serving as cultural markers of worth, belonging, and legitimacy. The privileging of Eurocentric features, light skin, straight hair, and specific facial structures has perpetuated a model of beauty linked to whiteness. Such standards not only exclude but also encourage internalised racism, while marginalised individuals adopt and reproduce the very ideals that deny their value.

1. 1 Defining Racism

Racism is not simply a matter of prejudice or hatred; it involves the inherent superiority or inferiority of racial groups, and individuals do not merely hold these beliefs. Still, they are embedded in the institutions, policies, and social structure that govern collective life. Thus, racism is best understood as a system of power that maintains racial hierarchies and systemically advantages certain groups, particularly the white population, while marginalising others. Racism manifests in various forms, which scholars often categorise into interpersonal, internalised, institutional and structural racism. To define racism, therefore, is not merely as

individual bias or hostility but as broader, systemic conditions that shape life chances, identities, and social relations. Moreover, racism is a multidimensional and enduring force that cannot be fully understood without attention to history, power, and systemic inequality. It is both ideological and material, shaping not just how people think and feel about each other, but also how societies are organised and governed. Importantly, racism adapts to changing social conditions; it can be explicit or hidden, violent or silent, direct or institutionalised. Understanding racism requires not only a grasp of its historical development but also a critical awareness of how it persists today through both visible and invisible mechanisms. Only by acknowledging these realities can we begin to imagine a more just and equitable society.

1. 1. 1. Types of Racism

Racism is a deeply rooted social issue that continues to shape the lives and opportunities of millions across the globe. It manifests in various forms, both overt and subtle, making it a complex and enduring force in society. Understanding the different types of racism: interpersonal, internalised, institutional, and structural racism is crucial for recognising how prejudice and discrimination are perpetuated through everyday interactions, policies, and societal norms. Exploring and defining these types, demonstrating how they intersect and reinforce social hierarchies based on race. By analysing these categories, we gain a fuller picture of how racism operates and sustains inequality.

1. 1. 1. 1. Internalised Racism

This type of racism comprises our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture; this can take many different forms, including prejudice toward people of different races, internalised oppression, the negative beliefs that people of colour may hold about themselves, and internalised privilege, the beliefs in superiority or entitlement often held by white people. Internalised racism, as explored through various thinkers, refers to the

phenomenon in which individuals from targeted racial groups unconsciously absorb and internalise negative societal messages and stereotypes about their own races. This can lead to self-doubt, low self-esteem, and even disdain for one's own racial identity. Thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, among others, have contributed significantly to understanding how internalised racism operates within social structures and shapes individual consciousness.

Through the lens of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon analysed the psychological impact of colonialism and racism on the colonised mind. He argued that internalised racism distorts the psyche, leading individuals to adopt the dehumanising views of the dominant (white, colonial) culture. As a result, they become alienated from their own racial identity. Fanon maintained that those subjected to racial oppression eventually internalise the negative stereotypes and judgments imposed upon them. Over time, this internalisation fosters feelings of inferiority, self-rejection, and shame. For Fanon, this inner conflict represents one of the most devastating legacies of colonialism, as it fractures the self and can be an immense barrier to being truly free, even after political independence is achieved.

According to Albert Memmi, Memmi in his seminal work *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), he not only highlighted how the colonizer's worldview is imposed on the colonized, but also showed how this imposition fosters a sense of inferiority and self-doubt. It also explains that colonialism creates an unfair and harmful relationship. He emphasises that colonizers not only control land and resources, they also impose their values, language, and culture on the people they colonize. Over time, this makes the colonized feel like their own culture isn't good enough. As a result, they may begin to perceive themselves as less capable or valuable, comparing themselves to the colonizers who are regarded as better or more civilized. This causes the colonised to feel disconnected from their identity and culture.

1. 1. 1. 2 Interpersonal Racism

In *The Bluest Eye,* Toni Morrison reveals how interpersonal racism enacted in direct, person-to-person interactions permeates the lives of her characters, shaping their identities and relationships. This form of racism is not only expressed through explicit acts of discrimination, but also through subtle insults, social exclusions, and everyday microaggressions. Set in 1940s, the novel depicts a society in which Black individuals, particularly black women and girls, are subjected to constant judgment and prejudices rooted in white supremacist ideals. These interactions, often appearing mundane or casual, reinforce the racial hierarchy and contribute to the internalisation of self-hatred among Morrison's characters.

Pecola Breedlove, the tragic centre, experiences interpersonal racism in numerous encounters. In the storefront where she lives, her very presence is treated as an inconvenience; her world seems diminished before her, "they set her down in front of the dish that this world offered … and she ate angrily from it". This metaphorical "dish" captures the minimal, begrudging sustenance she is allowed, a vivid expression of dismissal and exclusion in school, she endures taunts that reinforce the impossible ideals imposed upon her:" blue-eyed, yellow-hair, blue-eyed, yellow-hair, everybody wants those eyes". This chant mocks Pecola's difference while chanting the unattainable beauty she longs for, deepening her sense of inadequacy and fueling her self-loathing.

Interpersonal racism in the novel is not limited to encounters with white characters; Morrison also portrays how racism's psychological impact of fosters division within the black community itself. Maureen Peal, a light-skinned Black girl, is favoured and celebrated, becoming a symbol of proximity to white beauty standards. Her condescension toward Pecola and other darker-skinned peers embodies the horizontal enforcement of colourism and internalized prejudice. As Morrison writes, almost in resignation, "Maureen, I don't wish to

speak of her," suggesting both enmity and an acknowledgement of how torn their relationships have become.

These personal exchanges laden with disdain or longing function cumulatively as psychological violence. Morrison carefully maps out how interpersonal racism injures not just in isolated moments, but through a steady accumulation of rejection, ridicule, and exclusion. These intimate moments shape self-peception, belonging, and aspiration in profoundly damaging ways. Whether through tension-laden silences, pointed remarks, or competitive cleavages among peers, *The Bluest Eye* illustrates how racism is enacted daily through ordinary gestures, words, and silences that carry the weight of systemic oppression.

1. 1. 1. 3 Institutional Racism

This type of racism occurs within institutions and systems of power. This refers to the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.). More than 25 years ago, the sociologist David Mason(Mason 1982), argued that institutional racism was deeply embedded in established conventions in American society, for Mason, conceptualization failed to provide a clear theoretical basis for specifying the mechanisms through which institutional rather than individual racism operated to disadvantage certain groups over others. Mason (Mason 1982:44) called instead for the theoretical tools to explain the interplay of social structure and human action, material conditions and ideas which could then be subjected to empirical evaluation.

Basically, Mason believed that the way institutional racism have been explained wasn't enough, he thought we needed better theoretical tools to understand how social structures (like laws, institutions, or the economy) interact with people s actions, the conditions they live in, and the ideas they believe in. only then could we properly study and test how institutional racism actually functions in real life.

1.1.1. 4. Structural Racism

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores the devastating effects of structural racism the deeply embedded systems of inequality that operate through social, economic, political, and cultural institutions. Unlike interpersonal racism, which takes place in direct, person-to-person interactions, cultural racism functions as an invisible yet pervasive network of laws, practices, and cultural norms that privilege whiteness while disadvantaging black communities. Morrison situates her narrative in 1940s America, a period when segregation, discriminatory housing policies, and racially biased economic systems shaped every aspect of Black life. Through her characters' struggle, she reveals that racism is not merely an individual moral failing but a systemic reality that governs resources, shapes collective aspirations, and defines cultural values.

One of the clearest examples of structural racism in the novel, is the economic marginalization of the Breedlove family living in a decaying storefront, rather than a proper home is not simply the result of bad luck or personal shortcomings; it reflects the discriminatory housing policies and economic barriers that confined many Black families to substandard living conditions. Morrison describes their home with stark imagery; “they lived their because they were poor and black, and they stayed their because they believed they were ugly”(p.38). This statement fuses material deprivation with internalized racism, showing how structural exclusion and psychological damage reinforce one another.

The school system in *The Bluest Eye* also mirrors structural racism. Claudia, Freida and Pecola encounter curricula and teachers who either ignore or undervalue black history, culture, and identity. In a sense, when Pecola is humiliated by classmates and left unsupported by her teacher, Morrison notes, “ the teacher called on her seldom, and then always with a sense of indulgence” (46). This “indulgence” is not kindness, but a subtle expression of low

expectations, reflecting an educational environment structured to privilege white students and diminish Black achievement.

Media and popular culture function as another arm of structural racism in the novel. The omnipresence of Shirley Temple, Mary Jane candy wrappers, and Hollywood films communicates a singular vision of beauty blond-hair, blue-eyes, fair-skin; that is inaccessible to Black girls like Pecola. The candy scene is telling:" to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane".(p. 50). Here, Morrison captures the cultural indoctrination that compels Black children to aspire to whiteness, equating it with worthiness and love.

Through these layered depictions, Morrison demonstrates that the oppression faced by her characters is not solely the product of overt prejudice but the cumulative effects of interconnected institutions designed to maintain racial hierarchy. Structural racism in *The Bluest Eye* operates through economic deprivation, educational bias, and cultural erasure, ensuring that even without direct acts of interpersonal hostility; the system continually reproduces inequality. Morrison's narrative thus exposes the insidious nature of systemic oppression, making visible the invisible structures that shape the lives of marginalised communities.

1. 2. Identity Formation in a Racialised Society

Beauty is often seen as a matter of individual taste; it is, in fact, deeply rooted in sociocultural and historical forces. Across cultures, standards of beauty are actively shaped by power structures, media influence. One of the most pervasive standards is the idealization of whiteness, which has been constructed not only as racial category but also as global aesthetic norm.

According to bell hooks in representing whiteness in the Black immigration (1992), she explored the social construction of whiteness as a dominant cultural position that is normalized and powerful. As well, she argues that whiteness is not simply a racial category, but a racial position of structural privilege and cultural authority constructed through historical and institutional processes that render it an unmarked norm, in contrast to how blackness is hyper-visible and associated with deviance and danger.

For hooks, whiteness functions as an invisible presence, rarely interrogated by people themselves. However, for black people, whiteness is always present, as it is experienced through everyday actions, exclusion and fear. She highlights how historical trauma continues to shape Black perceptions of whiteness. The legacy of slavery, colonialism and white violence has created a collective memory of whiteness as a terror. For many Black people the presence of whiteness can evoke fear, not only because of physical violence but because of the psychological harm of being constantly judged and defined through a white lens. This experience is particularly damaging to the formation of self-hood.

Hook does not portray black identity as purely reactive or victimised. On the contrary, she insists that the black imagination is a site of resistance and agency, in imagining whiteness not as neutral but as oppressive, absurd. Black communities create alternative narratives that assert their subjectivity. This act of counter representation becomes a political tool that allows for the construction of identity on different terms, not dictated by the dominant culture.

Ultimately, Hooks argues that identity in a racialised society is not formed in a vacuum. It emerges through a constant negotiation with dominant structures of meaning, particularly whiteness. Recognising and interrogating whiteness is essential for the formation of Black identity.

Frantz Fanon, he argues that colonialism not only subjugates people politically and economically, but also psychologically, by implanting the belief that whiteness is synonymous with superiority, beauty, and civilization, while blackness is associated with inferiority, barbarism, and ugliness. According to Fanon, colonized black individuals internalizes this hierarchy, leading to a profound psychological conflict and self hate. As he writes: " The black man has two dimensions. One with his own people, the other with the white man" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 9 Fanon,1952).

Fanon's insight into the psychological trauma caused by these imposed standards explains how Black people, in particular, strive to distance themselves from their own racial identity and emulate whiteness. This is especially evident in beauty practices, such as skin bleaching, hair straightening, and other methods designed to achieve a look closer to the European standards of beauty. Fanon's analysis of this internalisation highlights a broader colonial and capitalist system that perpetuates these standards globally through media, advertising, and fashion.

Fanon's concept of "the Epidermalization of inferiority" describes how Black people began to see their physical features such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture as inherent masks of inferiority. This concept remains relevant, as Western beauty standards, idolizing pale skin, thin features, and straight hair, continues to dominate globally, particularly in Hollywood and fashion industry.

The construction of whiteness as the global standard of beauty is neither accidental nor harmless. It is a powerful legacy of colonialism and racial capitalism that continues to shape perceptions of values, identities and belonging across cultures. Challenging and deconstructing these standards is a critical step toward fostering more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of beauty ones that celebrates rather than erase differences.

1. 3 Beauty Standards and the Construction of Whiteness

Beauty is often seen as a neutral or personal concept, but the standards that define beauty are deeply rooted in histories of race and power. Across the western world, ideals of femininity, thinness and light skin have long been shaped by Eurocentric values that elevate whiteness as the norm. Drawing on works such as Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Richard Dyer's *White* the analyse reveals how Black bodies have been historically excluded.

Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* provides a psychological and phenomenological perspective on how black individuals internalise white beauty ideals. He shows how colonialism and racism produce a deep sense of inferiority in the black subject, particularly through the constant valorisation of whiteness. He writes, "The Black man wants to be white. The white man is a symbol of purity, of beauty, of virtue" (Fanon 9). Beauty in this context, is not merely about appearance but about access to humanity. For the colonized subject, adopting the aesthetics of whiteness through skin lightening, hair straightening, or adopting Western fashion is often seen as a way to gain acceptance. Yet this desire is a kind of alienation, as Black subject can never inhabit the position of whiteness. Fanon's analysis reveals how beauty standards serve as tools of psychological domination, encouraging Black people to reject their own features and embody white ideals instead.

In his seminal work *White*, Richard Dyer explores how whiteness operates as both invisible and idealized within western culture. He argues that whiteness is rarely marked as a racial category but instead functions as universal, neutral backdrop against which all other races are defined. This unmarked status gives whiteness a position of privilege, especially in visual media where beauty is overwhelmingly associated with white features. Light skin, straight hair, thin noses, and Eurocentric facial structures(Dyer 9). the repeated portrayal of white women

as paragons of beauty in film, fashion, and advertising naturalizes whiteness as the ideal. As Dyer puts it, “white people are just people” while everyone else is marked as different” (Dyer 3). Thus, beauty standards are not only aesthetic but also racialised in ways that uphold white supremacy.

Beauty standards are far from neutral; they are powerful tools in the construction and maintenance of whiteness. As Fanon demontrates, these ideals take a profound psychologival tool on Black individuals, revealing how beauty becomes a site of exclusion. Richard Dyer illustrates that whiteness operates invisibly but powerfully, shaping our ideas of what is considered normal, desirable and beautiful. Together, these thinkers expose the racial politics embedded in seemingly aesthetic preferences, reminding us that the construction of beauty is deeply intertwined with the construction of race.

Chapter Two

Historical Background

Introduction

The nineteenth century in the United States was a period of profound contradiction, marked by both the entrenchment of slavery and the rise of reform movements that shaped the nation's moral and social order. American society was rigidly stratified along lines of race, class, and gender, with whiteness positioned at the centre of power, privilege, and cultural ideals. The institution of slavery structured economic and political life, while emerging social movements in the North reinforced racialised standards of morality and beauty. As cultural and scientific discourses sought to naturalise whiteness as superior, Black communities resisted their dehumanisation through acts of rebellion, intellectual production, and cultural expression. This chapter traces the interplay between race, class, reform, and aesthetics in nineteenth-century America, showing how structural hierarchies shaped not only social life but also ideals of beauty and humanity.

2. .1. 19th Century American Society Characteristics

Nineteenth-century American society was defined by sharp racial and class-based divisions that structured everyday life and reinforced a social hierarchy rooted in white supremacy. Within this structure were two dominant and interdependent group: the white landowning elite and the enslaved Black population. The material conditions of each class, shaped by race, labour, and legal status, formed the foundation for a social order that not only governed access to wealth and power but also shaped norms of morality, beauty, and human worth.

In the southern United States, large-scale agricultural plantations dominated the economy, relying almost entirely on labor of enslaved Africans and African Americans. The white landowning class, often composed of wealthy planters, held economic and political power. Their status was bolstered by legal system that institutionalized slavery and by cultural

ideologies that positioned them as the bearers of civilization and refinement. These men and their families lived in material comfort with access to education, leisure, and political influence. Their position atop the social hierarchy was seen not as a matter of circumstance but as a reflection of racial and moral superiority.

In stark contrast, enslaved people lived in brutal conditions marked by forced labor, family separation, physical punishment, and total denial of personal autonomy. They were considered property rather than persons, and their lives were controlled by slave codes that restricted movement, prohibited literacy, and enforced strict submission. Housing was typically substandard, with poor nutrition and minimal or non-existent medical care. Beyond economic exploitation, the enslaved population was dehumanized through cultural narratives that depicted them as intellectually inferior and physically suited to hard labor.

The conditions of enslavement were reinforced through visual and scientific representations that constructed blackness as both subhuman and hyper-physical. These depictions justified the social order and reinforced the notion that whiteness embodied by the landowning class was the neutral seat of power, beauty and rationality. This ideology was also gendered: white women were portrayed as delicate and virtuous, while black women were frequently represented as excessive, immoral, and sexually available.

Beyond slavery, 19th century America was also divided along class lines, Particularly in the Northern states, which were undergoing rapid industrialisation. A growing white working class emerged in urban centres, composed largely of poor labourers, immigrants, and women employed in factories and domestic service. These workers occupied an ambiguous social position: although they possessed legal freedoms denied to enslaved people, they remained economically vulnerable and subject to cultural stigmatization. Elite reformers and

middle-class commentators often viewed the poor workers with suspicion, associating poverty with moral failing and physical undesirability.

Thus, both race and class shaped the moral and aesthetic values of the era. As Richerd Dyer later argues in *white,* whiteness came to represent not just a racial category, but also a moral and physical ideal-defined by self-discipline, order and purity (Dyer 17). The wealth and refinement of the upper class were viewed as a sign of natural superiority, while the poverty and perceived disorder of the enslaved and working classes were used to justify their marginalisation.

19th-century American society was rigidly stratified. White landowners stood at the top, using both law and ideology to maintain their dominance, while enslaved Black people and poor laborers occupied the most exploited and devaluable positions. These divisions were not only material but also symbolic, reinforcing a worldview in which whiteness, wealth, and beauty were interlinked — a system of representation that would shape the development of American aesthetics, including beauty standards, for generations to come.

The social stratification of 19th-century America, between landowners and enslaved people, and among the expanding classes of free labourers, did not only structure economic life and political power; it also shaped cultural values and perceptions of the human body. Ideas of beauty, morality, and civilisation were closely tied to the hierarchy that governed society. Whiteness was not only the markers of legal and social privilege, but also an aesthetic ideal projected onto white, upper class bodies through fashion, literature, and pseudoscience. As social reform movements gained traction during this period, they too were influenced by these racialised and class-based assumptions.

2. .2. Social Reform Movements

The 19th century in the United States was not only an era of entrenched racial and class hierarchies but also a time of vigorous social reform. Movements for abolition, temperance, women's rights, and moral purity emerged across Northern states, spearheaded by predominantly white, middle-class activists who believed in the moral imperative to improve society. However, despite their progressive intentions, many of these movements were shaped by the racial and gendered ideologies of whiteness, morality, and beauty, solidifying these ideals within the emergence of national identity.

At the heart of many reform efforts was the belief in moral and physical self-discipline, a value system rooted in Protestant ethics and middle class respectability. This ethical code became especially visible in the temperance movement, which framed body as potential virtues or vice. Reformers promoted restrain in alcohol consumption, diet and sexuality particularly for women linking bodily control to spiritual and civic purity. As Sabrina explains in *Fearing The Black Body*, these ideals also influenced emerging beauty standards: thinness came to symbolise moral strength, while fatness (especially when associated with Black women) was cast as evidence of gluttony, laziness, or even savagery(Strings 45).

The cult of true womanhood reinforced this linkage between bodily discipline and racial purity. This dominant ideology positioned white women as paragons of piety, purity, and domestic virtue. These women were seen as the moral backbone of the nation, and their physical appearance, with light skin, modest dress, and slim figures, was presented as evidence of their inner virtue. Black women, by contrast, were excluded from this framework altogether. In popular imagery and scientific literature, Black people were portrayed as hypersexual, physically excessive, and morally deviant. These dichotomies were central to the reformist

imaginary: the white woman was to be protected and emulated, while the Black woman was to be corrected, erased, or disciplined.

Moreover, early the feminist and abolitionist women, including figures like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Frances Willard, often appealed to supremacist language even as they called for gender equality. Many aligned their cause with the project of civilising society, implicitly framing white femininity as the aesthetic and moral ideal. In the context of the 19th century reform, whiteness became synonymous with progress, beauty. Whereas racialised bodies particularly Black and Indigenous women were framed as obstacles to national more development

The rise of pseudo-scientific racism in the later half of the century, further entrenched these distinctions reformers and physicians alike used science to classify races and genders according to physical and intellectual capacity, often arguing that white women's bodies were naturally more refined and beautiful. As Fanon would later note in *Black Skin, White Masks,* colonial societies are do not merely dominate the non -white subject politically, they also control images of beauty and humanity. Fanon writes: "always measured against whiteness, always falling short" (Fanon 10). in this light, social reform movements, while appearing moral or egalitarian, contributed to the symbolic erasure of Black beauty and black subjectivity.

Reform movements in 19th century America provided a cultural platform through which white, bourgeois ideals of virtue and beauty were institutionalized. The body became a moral text, legible through its conformity to or deviation from white standards. Whiteness, especially white womanhood, was cast not only as desirable but as the national ideal and a model to be protected, admired, and replicated. These reformist aesthetics played a critical role in shaping beauty standards that continue to privilege whiteness today, under the guise of health, modesty and refinement.

While 19th century reform movements aimed to reshape American society through appeals to morality, discipline, and civic virtue, they were deeply embedded in the same racial hierarchies they often claimed to oppose. As white reformers constructed ideals of moral and aesthetic superiority around whiteness, they also participated consciously or not in the marginalisation of Black bodies and voices. Across the same century, enslaved people and free Black communities resisted these oppressive structures through both subtle acts of defiance and organized rebellions.

2. .3 Racial Tensions

Despite the dominant of hierarchies in the 19th century, America the system of white supremacy was never uncontested. Throughout the century, enslaved are free Black people resisted their dehumanization through rebellion, fight, intellectual production, and everyday acts of defiance. These struggles did not only represent a political threat to the institution of slavery, they also challenged the visual, symbolic and ideological foundation of whiteness.

One of the most significant uprisings of the century was NAT TURNER`s rebellion in 1831, a slave led revolt in Virginia that left over 50 white people dead and sent shockwaves through the Southern slave-holding class. In the aftermath, white authorities imposed brutal punishments on Black communities killing hundreds in retaliation.

This shift in perception lead to greater recognition of black communities; instead, it triggered a violent Backlash that intensified the demonization of Blackness. Popular media and literature of the time increasingly depicted Black men as threats to white purity and order, especially to white women. These justifications justified stricter laws and deeper surveillance, but they also revealed the fragility of whiteness as a social construct. As Richard Dyer observes, whiteness is not a natural given but a performance that depends on constant maintenance through representation, violence and exclusion. It “needs to be made invisible while asserting

its dominance" (Dyer 9). slave rebellions forced whiteness into visibility, making its anxieties and contradictions starkly apparent.

The response to Black resistance was not only political but also aesthetic. White women were increasingly portrayed as needing protection, not only from physical violence but from the symbolic disruption of their status as moral and beautiful ideals. This dynamic reveals how deeply intertwined racial politics were with gender and beauty. Enslaved women who resisted whether by positioning their masters, aborting their pregnancies forced upon them, or fighting back physically were stripped of femininity in the white imagination. They were described as monstrous, savage, or hypersexual, reinforcing a binary between the white, virtuous woman and the dangerous, deviant Black woman.

Fanon in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks,* is especially helpful in understanding these dynamics. Fanon explains how black resistance challenges not only political power but also the symbolic order of colonial societies. The Black body, he writes, is constructed as 'phobogenic', both feared and desired, always over-determined by projections of white anxiety and fantasy (Fanon 150). slave rebellions, therefore, were not only physical uprisings but moments that forced white America to confront the instability of its own myths: the myth of racial superiority, the myth of natural beauty, and the myth of white virtue.

Even outside of open rebellion, the existence of free Black communities in the north and the spread of abolitionist literature such as *The Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass* helped to disrupt the visual and narrative control of whiteness. Black intellectuals and activists used their voices, bodies, and pens to assert their humanity, dignity and beauty in a society that denied them.

In short, racial tensions and slave rebellions in the 19th century America were more than moments of political crises; they were symbolic confrontations with the very foundations of

racialized aesthetics. They exposed whiteness not as stable norm but as a fragile construct that relied on constant position of Blackness. In these moments of resistance, the social meanings of the body beautiful, who is human, who is feared were temporarily unsettled, revealing the deep ideology work needed to keep whiteness in place.

2. 4 Beauty Standards in the 19th Century America

Beauty standards in the 19th century America did not emerge in a vacuum; they were shaped by the broader cultural forces of slavery, scientific racism, patriarchy, and nationalism. During this period, ideals of physical appearances particularly those applied to women became a powerful means of maintaining racial and social hierarchies. The emerging beauty norms were concerned not only with appearance but also deeply with moral, racial and civilizational ideals. The body, particularly the female body, became a symbolic terrain where whiteness was aestheticized and non-whiteness marginalized.

The dominant beauty ideal of the time was rooted in white, upper-class femininity: pale skin, a slender or tightly corseted figures, soft facial features. These traits were associated with purity, fragility, and moral superiority qualities that symbolized the supposed refinement of white civilization. This ideal was promoted through portraiture, fashion illustrations, and later, photography, and it excluded Black, indigenous, and immigrant women from the category of the beautiful.

As Sabrina Strings argues in *Fearing The Black Body*, this period saw the rise of thinness as a racialized ideal. In constrast to earlier centuries, when curvier bodies were sometimes celebrated, the 19th century marked a shift toward associating thinness with self-control, rationality, and whiteness. Strings notes that white Protestant reformers began liking fatness with Blackness, excess, and moral failure. In doing so, the white female body was presented not only as aesthetically superior but as more civilized restrained, spiritual, and

disciplined (Strings 52). These discourses were part of a broader attempt to distance white femininity from the stereotypes ascribed to Black women, who were often depicted in visual culture as hyper sexual, indulgent, and physically excessive

Furthermore, the rise of scientific racism in the 19th century gave pseudo-scientific justification to these aesthetic hierarchies. Craniometry, phrenology, and other racial sciences were used to argue that white European features were biologically superior. As Richard Dyer observes in *White*, beauty became a tool for naturalising whiteness as the ideal form of humanity" white bodies," he writes, " are the bodies of value, of aspiration, of civility", while other bodies are rendered "too much"too dark, too fleshy, too emotional(Dyer 24). thus, beauty standards operated as a racial code, teaching Americans to associate whiteness with virtue, and non-whiteness with degradation.

Frantz Fanon's insights in *Black Skin, White Masks* help us to understand the psychological effects of these racialized beauty norms on people of color. Fanon describes how colonial and racialized societies impose a white gaze that defines the norm of beauty and humanity. For the Black subject, beauty is often something located outside themselves in whiteness and thus they are compelled to measure themselves against impossible standards. Fanon writes that " the black man is constantly in self-division …. in pursuit of a whiteness that denies his body and being" (Fanon 138). In the context of the 19th century America, Black women were not only denied beauty and dehumanized through stereotypes that portrayed them as sexually deviant or grotesque, reinforcing their exclusion from both social and aesthetic legitimacy.

Nineteenth-century America was defined by the intertwining of racial, class, and gender hierarchies that reached far beyond the institution of slavery. Whiteness was elevated as both a social privilege and an aesthetic ideal, reinforced through movements pseudo-scientific

discourses, and cultural representations. At the same time, enslaved and free black communities contested these hierarchies, exposing the fragility of white supremacy as a construct dependent on constant justification. Beauty standards, moral codes, and notions of civility, embedding racialized values into the nation's cultural fabric. This complex historical backdrop is essential for understanding the later emergence of racialized beauty standards in American literature and culture.

Chapter Three

Race and Identity in The Bluest Eye

Introduction

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison exposes the pervasive and multi-layered nature of racism, showing how it shapes both external and internal lives. Racism in the novel is not confined to acts of open hostility; it manifests structurally through institutions that privilege whiteness, culturally through dominant beauty standards and media representations, and internally through the self-loathing, these forces produce within Black communities. By tracing these interlocking forms of oppression, Morrison reveals how racism works to fracture identity, leaving characters struggling with invisibility, alienation, and painful desire for validation.

3. 1 Types of Racism in The Novel

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is not only a poignant narrative about a young black girl's tragic longing for blue eyes, but also a profound exploration of the many faces of racism in mid-twentieth-century America.

Set in 1940s, the novel exposes how racial oppression operates on multiple levels interpersonal, internalized, institutional and structural racism. Shaping the lives, identities and features of its characters. Morrison refuses to confine racism to overt acts of hatred; instead, she reveals it as a complex system woven into daily life, reinforced through institutions, economic arrangements, educational practices, and even the intimate interactions between individuals.

By presenting racism as both a personal experience and a societal structure, *The Bluest Eye* show how prejudice, discrimination, and internalized self-loathing are sustained across generations. This chapter examines the novel through the lens of different types of racism, demonstrating how Morrison's narratives make visible how the intertwined forces that sustain racial inequality and shape the psychological reality of those forced to live under its weight.

3. 1. 1. Interpersonal Racism

This form of racism manifests in the attitudes, words, and behaviours exchanged between individuals often within the same community. Morrison shows how interpersonal racism devastates self-worth and reinforces systemic oppression. The most obvious instances of interpersonal racism come from white character who treat blacks with open disdain; one early and painful example occurs when Pecola goes to buy candy; his body language and refusal to see at her raptures a deeply racial bias. « He does not see her, because for him, there is nothing to see »

However, Morrison also emphasizes that, this type of racism is not limited to white aggression within the black community; individuals absorb and reproduce racist values, often turning against each other. Even more is the interaction between Pecola and Maureen Peal, a light-skinned black girl who wields her beauty and mocks Pecola, « I am cute ! And you ugly ! Black and ugly black »(p.73)

Maureen's treatment reflects how colourism functions as interpersonal racism within the black community.

Furthermore, Morrison complicates interpersonal racism by showing how it functions across class and gender line. For instance, Geraldine, a middle class Black woman, who finds respectable, light skin is white and poor and dark skin is bad. When her son lures Pecola into their home, only to harm her, Geraldine finds her and treats with cold dismissal. « Get out…You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house ». (p.32). In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison exposes the violence of interpersonal racism and how it becomes a tool of domination and survival.

3. 1. 2 Internalised Racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Morrison reveals how racism is not only exists in laws, institutions, but also becomes deeply in minds of those who were oppressed. Through the psychological experiences of her character, particularly Pecola and her mother, it results in emotional devastation and the destruction of self-worth. Pecola Breedlove is the clearest example, from her only age, she is thought by her family, peers and community, that she is ugly, her longing for blue eyes is not about vanity, but about survival to avoid bullying. She believes that having this symbol of whiteness will finally make her visible, loved and safe.

"It occurred to Pecola some time ago, that if her eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself be different" (p.46), Her belief is validated by everyone around her, who make her choose even the blonde blue-eyed girl not for the taste, but because the candy offers her a temporary connection to beauty.

« To eat the candy is somehow eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, love Mary Jane, be Mary Jane » (p.50), Pecola does not only love MatyJane, but she wants to be her.

Morrison also express internalized racism through Pauline Breedlove. Pecola's mother Pauline, internalized beliefs affect how she performs her motherhood, through Pauline, Morrison demonstrates, how internalized racism become normalized, Pauline judges herself and others (including her daughter) according to white ideals, this leads her to love the little white girl she nannies more tenderly than Pecola, reinforcing for her child that whiteness is lovable, Blackness is not, even when she slaped her daughter. " Mrs Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and said gently to the blue little white girl, you alright baby ?"(p.85).

Even within the black community, internalized racism leads to horizontal violence the act of turning racist beliefs against each other. Maureen Peal, a light skinned Black girl, ridicules Pecola's darkness and poverty.

" I am cute ! And you ugly ! Black and ugly " (p.73). Maurren has learned that proximity to whiteness grants power, and she uses it to dominate others who are lower. This type of racism is the most harmful; it lead Pecola to madness, she believes that she has a blue eyes, speaking to an imaginary friend who reassures her that finally, she is beautiful. In fact, it is just a delusion born from trauma. As Morrison writes "the damage was total, she spent days, walking up, her head jerking to this beat of drummer so distant, only her could hear " (p.204). Here we notice that racism is not always visible or physical; it can also exist in the mind.

3. 1. 3 Institutional Racism

This type of racism, as Morrison defines it, is embedded in schools, stores, media, and religion. These systems enforce white supremacy by devaluing blackness. Through the experiences of Pecola Breedlove and her community, Morrison exposes how deeply institutional racism structures everyday life and contribute disrespect and limiting access to power and dignity.

One of the clearest examples of institutional racism appears in the education system, where Pecola and other black children are exposed to white cultural norms and values. Schools do not say Black children are inferior, but through its structure and interactions it favor whiteness. When the light-skinned Maureen Peal is praised by teachers and admired by classmates, it reveals how schools reinforce racial hierarchies. "When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly" (p. 32). This quote shows how lighter skin and proximity to whiteness result in better treatment.

Similarly, the media promotes damaging ideals that present whiteness as beautiful and blackness as ugly. The characters absorb these ideas from a young age, so when Pecola prays all the time to have blue eyes, believing they will make her loved and visible, means that these beauty norms are not simply individual preferences. But they are mass produce and institutionally absorb, as Morrison writes: “The world has agreed that a blue eyed, yellow haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured ” (p.20).

This reveal how media and commercial institutions promote white beauty as the universal ideal. It is an example of how systemic racism reinforced through cultural products, advertising, and entertainment.

In addition, economic and commercial institutions reflect and produce racism. When Pecola goes to buy candy, the white shopkeeper, treats her with indifference and disgust “He doesn’t see her, because for him there is nothing to see ” (p.48). Pecola’s simple act of buying candy becomes an experience of racial alienation. His refusal to look at her or touch her hands reflect that black presence in white dominant spaces is devalued.

Moreover, religion institutions are also implicated, the community is shaped by religious teachings that upholds the racial values. This is clearly performed in the church’s silence on injustice and its encouragements of submission, enable the racial oppression to persist.

“The truly holly are white” (p.86), this short quote highlights how religions teachings are used to associate whiteness with holiness and purity.

3. 1. 4. Structural Racism

In *The Bluest Eye,* Toni Morrison masterfully explores the psychological and social devastation wrought by structural racism on Black communities in mid-20th-century America. Morrison’s narrative transcends depictions of overt racism to expose the deeper, systemic

mechanisms that shape the lives of her Black characters, particularly young girls like Pecola Breedlove. Structural racism, defined as the interlocking system of power embedded in institutions like education, media, and housing, functions as the invisible architect of Pecola's suffering. As Morrison reveals, racism is not confined to personal prejudices of individuals but is encoded into the very fabric of American life, shaping ideals of beauty, morality and worth. Through Pecola's descent into madness and her community's complicity, Morrison critiques a society whose institutional structure quietly but forcefully enforces white supremacy.

A central institution through which structural racism operates in *The Bluest Eye* is the media, particularly its role in constructing racialized beauty standards. From Shirley Temple films to candy wrappers featuring white girls, the cultural landscape idiolizes whiteness and equates beauty with white skin, blue eyes, and blond hair. Pecola's longing for blue eyes is not merely a childish desire; it is survival strategy, shaped by media environment that renders Blackness invisible or grotesque. As bell hooks in *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* " white supremacy has taught (Black People) that whiteness is the symbol of beauty" (hooks 63). Morrison illustrates this conditioning with piercing clarity. Pecola believes that blue eyes will make her lovable and human in a society that otherwise treats her with contempt. Her psychological disintegration is a direct result of cultural narratives that deny her dignity.

These beauty ideals are not a passive aesthetic preference but a racialized tool of domination. As Sabrina Strings argues in *Fearing the Black Body,* European and American conceptions of beauty have historically been used to construct and justify white supremacy by defining Black bodies as undesirable and inferior (Strings 28). Morrison channels this same logic in her portrayal of the Breedloves, who accept their ugliness not as subjective perception but as an "objective" truth handed down by a racist culture. They " believed they were ugly, because they had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement"

(Morrison 39). This belief is reinforced by institutions like media, school, religion that naturalized whiteness as normative and Blackness and Blackness as deviation.

Structural racism also shapes economic and spatial realities in the novel. The Breedloves live in a run-down storefront, not because of individual failure, but because of systemic exclusion from wealth and property. As Michelle Alexander notes in *The New Jim Crow. "*the racial caste system persists not only through law enforcement but also through economic marginalisation" (Alexexander 213). He luck of social support, healthcare, housing security, or access to upward mobility are well products of a racist system that dispropriately disadvantages Black Americans. Cholly breedlove's personal failures, his alcoholism, his violence are less about moral weakness than about the cumulative effects of social abandonment and generational trauma.

Moreover, educational institutions in the novel contribute to Pecola's marginalisation. She is never treated as a student with potential, but rather as an object of pity or invisibility. The teachers ignore her, peers mock her, and the school system does nothing to protect her self-esteem or development. This aligns with current critiques of educational inequality, which argue that Black children; especially girls, are often overlooked, under-supported, and pathologized in the classroom (Crenshaw 15). Claudia, in contrast, resists these structures through a rebellious consciousness, but even she is not fully immune to the pull of whiteness as the standards.

Frantz Fanon's concepts "Epidermalization of inferiority" from *Black Skin, White Masks* is beneficial in understanding Pecola's psyche unraveling. Fanon describes how the colonized subjects internalizes the image of the colonizer, seeing themselves as inferior and ugly through the gaze of the dominant culture (Fanon 11). Pecola's madness, her final, heart-breaking belief that she has blue eyes, is not merely delusion, but a rational reaction to an irrational world. In

her madness, she achieves what the system has taught her to desire, even if it means losing her grip on reality. Morrison's choice to let Pecola find solace in her delusion is both tragic and revealing: is a structurally racist society, madness becomes the only refuge for a Black girl who desires to be loved.

The Bluest Eye is a profound critique of structural racism and its far-reaching effects on Black identity. By examining how institutions like media, education and housing construct and reinforce racial hierarchies, Morrison unveils the systemic nature of oppression. The novel urges the readers to see racism not just in explicit acts of hatred but in the normalized standards, laws and practices that shape Black life from birth. Through Pecola's story, Morrison offers a powerful reminder that structural racism kills not only the body but also the soul, and that dismantling it requires more than kindness; it requires systemic change.

3. 2. Impact of Racism on Identity

Morrison, in her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), constructs a harrowing portrait of racialised identity formation within a society structured by white supremacy. Set in the 1940s, the novel interrogates how systemic and internalized racism infiltrates the private and public lives of Black Americans, particularly Black women and children.

Morrison rejects simplistic understandings of racism as merely overt discrimination; instead, she presents it as pervasive, structural force that operates through beauty norms, familial structures, and interpersonal relationships. In doing so, Morrison uncovers how whiteness functions not only as a social ideals but as a violent standard that deforms Black selfhood. Here we explore how racism shapes and distorts identity in *The Bluest Eye* through its devastating impact on key characters: Pecola Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Claudia MacTeer, and Maureen Peal.

Pecola Breedlove, the novel's tragic center, embodies the extreme consequences of internalized racism. From the outset, Pecola is socialised into a world that deems her blackness synonymous with ugliness. Her physical features; dark skin, kinky hair, and broad nose are framed as the antithesis of beauty, Pecola's desire for blue eyes, rather than being superficial, signals a desperate longing for recognition, love and existential worth. Morrison writes, " it had occurred o Pecola some time ago that if her eyes ….were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 46). This implicit belief that blue eyes will grant her visibility and love illustrates the profound psychological violence inflicted by white beauty ideals. Pecola does not simply wish to be beautiful; she hopes to be legible as human. Her descent into madness at the novel's end, where she believes she has acquired blue eyes, is Morrison's indictments of a society that so thoroughly devalues Blackness that it drives it children into psychosis. The final narrator notes," the damage done was total"(204)

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, reveals how internalised racism can rupture maternal identity. Pauline's early life in the south is marked by poverty and insecurity, but it is only after her migration north and immersion into white culture that she begins t internalize dominant aesthetic norms. Working as a maid for a whit family, she comes to idealize white beauty and order, viewing her employer's home as a sanctuary of elegance and virtue in contrast to her own chaotic household. Morrison illustrates Pauline's racialized self-loathing: "She was jealous of the women in movies who had the same hair and skin as the white family …She looked down at her own brow, crooked tooth in shame"(122). Her maternal identity becomes structured by this internal hierarchy: she gives tenderness to the white child she cares for and withholds it from Pecola. Pauline is not a naturally neglectful mother; rather, her inability to love her daughter stems from a racist cultural system that has taught her to see herself and her kin as inherently unlovable.

Cholly Breedlov, Pecola's father, represents the intergenerational transmission of racial trauma. His character arc is shaped by abandonment and public humiliation, particularly a formative accident in which he is mocked by white men while losing his virginity. This moment fuses sexuality with shame and powerlessness, disrupting his development of a stable masculine identity. His later actions, including the rape of Pecola, are abominable, but Morrison does not render him a one-dimensional villain. Instead, Cholly is portrayed as a man deformed by systemic racism, whose expression of love warped by violence. Morrison writes: "Cholly was free, Dangerously free to feel whatever he felt free, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity" (Morrison 159). His freedom is not liberator but anarchic, reflecting the psychic collapse engendered by life long racial dehumanization.

In contrast to Breedlove, Claudia MacTeer represents a voice of resistance. Unlike Pecola, Claudia questions the white beauty ideals imposed on her. When given a while doll, she does not adore it; she dismantles it: " We had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty"(21). Claudia's rejection of white femininity and her perceptive critique of how her community scapegoats Pecola signal consciousness that resists racial domination. Her family, though economically poor, provides her with a degree of emotional stability that protects her from the full weight of internalised racism. Claudia's retrospective narration positions her as both witness and analyst of racial violence, allowing Morrison to articulate a critique that is both personal and collective.

Mareen Peal, the light skinned girl at Pecola's school, exemplifies how racism operates through colorism within black communities. Although Black herself, Maureen is offered social privilege because of her proximity to whiteness. She is adored by teachers and students, treated as exceptional rather than representative. Her internalization of this conditional privilege is evident when she taunts Pecola: "I am cut!and you ugly! black amd ugly!" (morrison 73). Maureen's identity is validated only through exclusion; she maintains her sense of self by

degrading others who fall further from the white ideals. Her characters reveal how white supremacy incentivises intra-racial hierarchies and disunity.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison offers no easy redemption or closure. Instead, she compels readers to confront the structural and intimate workings of racism. Each character illustrates a different mechanism through which white supremacy fractures black identity through invisibility, self-loathing, parental alienation, gendered violence, and internal division. Yet, through Claudia's narration, Morrison also preserves a space for critical memory and resistance. The novel becomes not only a record of racial trauma but an act of witnessing and naming. In doing so, Morrison calls for a re-imagining of value, beauty, and self-hood outside the violent gaze of whiteness.

Chapter Four

Race and Beauty in The Bluest Eye

4. 1. *The Bluest Eye* as a Symbol

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison presents a haunting meditation on the destructive power of white beauty standards in a racially stratified society. The title itself is a symbolic distillation of the novel's central concern: the internalized racism and self-loathing experienced by African Americans, especially young Black girls, when they are taught that their value lies in how closely they resemble white ideals. The " bluest eye" becomes more than a physical trait it is a metaphor for erasure, a false promise of love, worth, and visibility. Morrison constructs this symbol to present white beauty ideology, internalised racial inferiority, and the psychic trauma inflicted upon the black female subject.

From the beginning of the novel, Pecola Breedlove is positioned as invisible and unloved. Her longing for blue eyes emerges not simply from a desire to be beautiful, but from a deeper yearning to be seen, validated, and protected in a world that has rendered her disposal. Morrison writes," It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different"(Morrison 46).

Blue eye here are not neutral features; they are cultural markers of whiteness, symbolizing everything, Pecola lacks social mobility, affection, attention and acceptance. The white gaze has been internalized to the point that Pecola equates beauty and worth with whiteness. As bell hooks argues, " the power of the white gaze has always been a way to assert control, to define reality for others"(Black Looks 168). Morrison's symbolic use of *The Bluest Eye*, therefore, reveals how dominant white norms have violently shaped the psyche of Black-youth.

4. 2. Internalised Racism and the Desire for Whiteness

The symbolic potency of the "bluest eye" lies in its encapsulation of internalized racism. Pecola's desire is not born in isolation but shaped by a culture saturated with icons of white femininity from Shirley Temple to the white bay dolls she receives. Her community reinforces these ideals. Even Claudia, the narrator, reflects on how she is exposed to admire white dolls but instinctively feels repulsed by them, "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" (Morrison 21).

This early resistance in Claudia contrasts with Pecola's submission to the same ideal. While Claudia questions the value of whiteness, Pecola absorbs it until it becomes her only frame of reference. Frantz Fanon's theory of the "epidermal schema" is applicable here. In *Black Skin, Whit Masks*, Fanon noes: "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon 110). Pecola's symbolic craving for blue eyes illustrates how the white gaze has eroded her sense of identity and worth, leaving only an aspiration to embody the very force that negates her existence.

Pecola's eventual descent into madness marks tragic fulfillment of the symbolic " bluest eyes". By the novel's end, she believes she has acquired blue eyes, conversing with an imaginary friend who validates her beauty is a symptom of deep psychological damage. In the novel's afterward, Morrison notes:

"A little Black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (Afterworld xvii)

The acquisition of the "bluest eye" is not liberator but annihilating. Pecola's fractured identity cannot bear the weight of this false ideal. Her madness is not resistance, but the final act of symbolic violence enacted by a society that has rendered her invisible. Thus, the " bluest

eye" becomes a cruel paradox, it promises beauty and belonging but delivers only isolation and erasure.

While Pecola is the novel's most tragic character, Morrison broadens the reach of the "bluest eye" symbol to other figures in the community. Maureen Peal, the light skinned girl admired by teachers and classmates, wields her proximity to whiteness as a weapon. Geraldine, another character, rejects what she calls "funky" Blackness and aligns herself with white middle-class respectability, even showing more affection to her own child. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, escapes her domestic dissatisfaction through Hollywood fantasies where beauty is synonymous with whiteness and deformity with Blackness. These characters all participate in and perpetuate the same symbolic order that destroys Pecola. Morrison thus shows that the "bluest eye" is not a personal desire but a cultural pathology.

Through the haunting symbol of the "bluest eye", Morrison critiques the legacy of racial self-hatred and the devastating allure of white beauty ideals. Pecola's tragedy reveals the full cost of internalized racism, not only the loss of self-worth but the erasion of reality itself. *The Bluest Eye s*tands as a metaphor for how structural racism and the media's construction of beauty operates on the most intimate level: the mind. In rendering this symbol so powerfully, Morrison does not simply condemn a society that fails to see Black girl as beautiful, she indicts a culture that teaches them to see themselves as worthless. Ultimately, *The Bluest Eye* demands a radical re-imagining of beauty and belonging, one that refuses the tyranny of whiteness and affirms Black life in all its complexity.

4. 3. Pecola's Obsession with Whiteness in *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* offers a powerful portrayal of how racism and white beauty standards infiltrate the minds of Black girls in the 20th-century America. At the heart of the novel, is Pecola Breedlove, a young, dark-skinned Black girl whose life unravels under

the weight of poverty, neglect and a deeply internalized belief that beauty and the extension, love, safety, and worth reside in whiteness her obsession with blue eyes symbolizes more than a superficial desire; it reflects a tragic internalization of systemic racism that distorts her sense of self and ultimately leads to her psychological disintegration. Here we explore the depth and implications of Pecola's fixation on whiteness, arguing that Morrison uses to expose the emotional violence inflicted by racialised beauty standards and the cultural hegemony of whiteness.

From the earliest moments in the novel, Pecola is rendered invisible not only by society at large but by her own community and family. She is described as "ugly", not inherently, but in comparison to an idealised whiteness that dominates her social and emotional world. The association between whiteness and beauty is everywhere in Pecola's life: in the Shirley Temple cups, the blue-eyed baby dolls, the movies, and the candy wrappers.

These objects are not innocent; they are loaded with racial meaning. Morrison writes: " 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 were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 46). Pecola does not simply want to look different; she wants to be different. For her, blue eyes are a portal to a world where she will finally be loved, visible, and safe.

This longing is the result of a social system that values whiteness and devalues Blackness. The equation repeatedly reinforced by those around her. Her mother, Pauline Breedlove, is enamored with white film heroines and white domestic spaces, spending more care on her white employers' home than on her own. Her father, Cholly, emotionally and physically abuses her, while her schoolmates mock her for her appearance. Pecola internalizes these messages, believing her Blackness is the root of her misery. She becomes convinced that

acquiring blue eyes is the only escape. Her obsession is therefore not narcissistic or irrational, but a desperate strategy for survival in a world that deems her unworthy.

The symbolic weight of Pecola's desire is amplified by the cultural dominance of the white gaze. bell hooks, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* identifies this gaze as a mechanism of control that not only objectifies Black but encourage them to see themselves through white eyes. As Hooks explains, " the power of the white gaze has always been a way to assert control, to define reality for others" (Hooks 168). Pecola's fantasy of blue eyes, is in a sense a wish to internalize the white gaze, to see the world and herself through a lens that promises value and visibility. Yet this gaze doesn't empower her; it erases her.

Morrison illustrates this with chilling clarity during the scene in which Pecola buys Mary Jane candies. The white, smiling girl on the wrapper becomes a figure of worship: " Pecola loved her. Loved blue eye, her yellow hair, her white skin, and most of all, her gladness" (Morrison 50). Pecola is not merely admiring Mary Jane; she is absorbing her as an ideal. The candy itself, meant to offer pleasure, becomes a symbolic consumption of whiteness. In loving Mary Jane, Pecola is rejecting herself. Her Blackness, in contrast, represents misery, invisibility, and ugliness.

Frantz Fanon's psychological theories in *Black Skin, Whits Masks* help deepen our understanding of Pecola's conditions. Fanon argues that colmial subjects often suffer from " epidermaklization", or the internalization of racial hierarchies that affect their very sense of being. He writes, "the Black man stops being an active person. He is acted upon. He is reduced to a body, to a thing" (Fanon 89). Pecola is not merely degraded by others, she begins to believe that she is unlovable and non-human. Her yearning for blue eyes becomes a tragic manifestation of this reduction: she is no longer Pecola; she wants to become the image of the white girl she believes the world adores.

This delusion culminates in the novel's final chapter, where Pecola retreats into madness and invents an imaginary friend who assures her that she finally has the bluest eyes. But the fulfilment of her dream is not liberating it is the final act of self-erasure. Morrison writes: "now when she looks in a mirror, she sees only her eyes, blue and borderless. The world is no longer hostile; she is no longer Pecola . she has finally disappeared into the fantasy of whiteness" (Morrison 195). Her transformation is not metaphor for transcendence but for destruction. Pecola does not escape racial violence; she succumbs to it completely.

Importantly, Morrison does not isolate Pecola's experiences. The symbolic power of whiteness affects other characters as well, including Maureen Peal, Geraldine, and Pauline Breedlove, all of whom seek proximity to whiteness to gain respectability or affection. Morrison thus reveals that Pecola's obsession is not abnormal, but emblematic of a broader cultural pathology. In a society where whiteness is idealized, and blackness is degraded, the desire to assimilate becomes widespread, if ultimately futile, strategy for self-preservation. But Pecola, being the most vulnerable, suffers its consequences most tragically.

Ultimately, Morrison uses Pecola's character to critique a system in which whiteness is equated with moral, aesthetic, and emotional superiority. Pecols's obsession with blue eyes is not about vanity; it is about survival in a society that systematically denies her worth. Morrison exposes how institutions from media to family reinforce these racial hierarchies, and how children like Pecola become casualties in the pursuit of an unattainable ideal. Her breakdown is not just a personal tragedy but a social indictment. By the end of the novel, Pecola is no longer just a character, she is a symbol of the devastating consequences of internalized racism and cultural worship of whiteness.

4. 4. Moving Beyond Internalized Racism

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is often read as a tragedy of internalized racism, showing how white beauty ideals and systemic oppression destroy the self-image of Black girls like Pecola Breedlove. Yet, to read it only as a narrative of victimhood would erase Morrison's nuanced portrayal of resistance, survival, and the possibility; however fragile, of moving beyond internalized racism, other characters, particularly Claudia MacTeer, offers a counter narrative that gestures toward resilience and renewal.

From the earliest scenes, Claudia rejects the cultural imposition of whiteness as the measure of beauty. When given blue-eyed dolls she responds not with adoration but with curiosity and even hostility: " I had only one desire: to dismember it, to see what it was made of, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me" (Morrison 21)

This rejection is not yet a fully articulated political stance; it is a child's instinctive refusal to accept what she has been taught was beautiful. Yet it represents an early act of cognitive disobedience, a refusal to absorb the ideology that damages Pecola. Claudia's skepticism toward Shirley Temple and white femininity resists the cultural propaganda that equates whiteness with worth.

This resistance is crucial because it shows that internalised racism is not inevitable. Claudia is subjected to the same white-dominated media, schooling and societal expectations as Pecola, but her interpretation differs. Morrison thereby illustrates that moving beyond internalized racism requires an alternative interpretive framework, one that questions and dismantles imposed hierarchies rather than accepting them as natural.

bell hooks, in *Black Looks: Race And Representation*, emphasizes that reclaiming self-definition is central to overcoming the psychological effects of white supremacy. For Hooks,

this means producing new images, stories, and spaces that affirm Blackness: " our struggle is also a struggle of images; we must make our own"(hooks 3)

Morrison's novel embodies this principle by centering black voices, memories, and experiences without catering to a white audience. Within the text, Claudia serves as a narrator who frames Pecola's story through her own community's lens, making space for collective memory. In doing so, she disrupts the white gaze that has dominated Pecol's life. Claudia's retrospective narration acknowledge complicity "we were wrong of course, but it doesn't matter now" (Morrison 206) while also challenging readers to see Pecola's suffering as the product of societal violence rather than personal failure.

Reclaiming self-definition is also present in the oral storytelling traditions embedded in the novel. The gossip, story telling, and fragmented recollections create a cultural archive that resists erasure. While some of this talk perpetuates harmful judgement, it also affirms the community's right to narrate its own history, a small but significant act of cultural survival.

Morrison, however, is not romantic about the easy of overcoming internalized racism. Pecola's complete psychological breakdown shows that resistance is not equally accessible to all. Her vulnerability stems not only from individual fragility but also from structural forces; poverty, sexual abuse, domestic violence and institutional neglect that leave her with no protective framework. By the end, Pecola speaks to an imaginary friend, convinced that she has blue eyes:

" No body will ever look at me and think I am ugly. No body will ever look at me and think I am not beautiful" (Morrison 204)

This imagined beauty is a form of survival, but it is tragically rooted in delusion it is the inverted mirror of Claudia's resistance: where Claudia deconstructs the white beauty ideal, Pecola internalizes it so profoundly that she retreats into fantasy. The contrast between the two

characters underscores a critical truth: moving beyond the internalized racism requires both personal resilience and collective support. Without community affirmation and alternative models of beauty, resistance remains fragile.

If Claudia offers a seed of resistance, Morrison's narrative points toward collective healing as the only sustainable path forward. This involves creating environment where Black beauty is normalized, where children grow up seeing themselves reflected positively in media, art, and education. As Frantz Fanon argued in *Black Masks, White Skins,* the colonised mind can only be colonised through a complete erasure of cultural values:

" in the world through which, I am endlessly creating myself"(Fanon 229)

In *The Bluest Eye*, glimpses of such reimagining appear in small, everyday acts; Claudia's curiosity, her rejection of dolls, her commitment to telling Pecola's story. These acts, though seemingly minor, challenge the dominance of white ideals by affirming that there are other ways of seeing, valuing, and loving oneself. Claudia's closing reflection is bittersweet: " it is too late, at least for her. Now we are left to wonder how" (Morrison 206).

This acknowledgment of loss, paired with remembrance, transforms the novel into both a warning and a call to action. Moving beyond internalised racism means refusing to allow Pecola's story to repeat; it means cultivating communities where Black children do not have to choose between survival and self-worth.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison transforms the symbol of blue eyes into a strong critique of internalized racism. For Pecola, her desire is both desperate attempt for survival and a symptom of her erasure; it promises love and value in her society but delivers only madness. In Pecola's tragedy, Morrison exposes the full violence of the white gaze, not only the power that defines but also the power that destroys. Yet, Morrison does not allow Pecola's story to stand alone, through Claudia, she op"ens a counterpoint. This fragile but vital resistance that

rejects the imposed authority of white beauty and looks for the legitimacy of Black self definition. This duality, Pecola's collapse and Claudia's survival marks the novel as a warning about the catastrophic consequences of internalized racism and a possibility of resilience and renewal. Ultimately, the novel insists that the cycle of racism can only be broken when Black beauty, dignity and humanity are affirmed within the community itself. Morrison's novel is not only a narrative, but also a call to action, to see differently and to create space where Black children do not have to feel inferior. Pecola's story may end in silence, but through Morrison's telling, it becomes a demand that her fate not to be repeated.

General Conclusion

This research attempts to explore Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* from the perspective of racism and its devastating impact of identity formation. This novel recounts the tragic life of Pecola Breedlove, reflects not only the painful reality of African Americans in the mid-20th century united states but also the long historical legacy of slavery, racism and white beauty standards through Pecola's yearning for blue eyes, Morrison transforms the abstract notions of whiteness, oppression, and cultural exclusion into an intimate and personal tragedy, one that illuminates the hidden violence of internalized racism. The study has set out to show that *The Bluest Eye* is not merely a story of one young black girl but a symbolic narrative that mirrors the collective trauma of Black communities living under systemic oppression.

The present thesis has demonstrated racism in Morrison's work operates on multiple, interconnected levels. Structural racism is the cultural norms and institutional frameworks that position whiteness as the ultimate measure of value. Interpersonal racism emerges in the daily humiliation and exclusions experienced by black characters. Most significantly, internalized racism, expressed through Pecola's desperate longing for blue eyes, reveals how deeply embedded racial hierarchies damage the psyche. Morrison's novel exposes racism not only as an external force but also as an internal reality that fragments selfhood and dignity. By reading the novel alongside theorist such as Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, and Richard Dyer. The study highlights how *The Bluest Eye* deals with broader critical discourse about race, beauty, and power.

The second aim of this study was to situate Morrison's narrative within its historical and cultural background. The research showed how 19th century American racial ideologies, scientific racism, and the construction of whiteness as beauty shaped cultural norms that persisted into the 20th century. Scholars such as Sabrina Strings demonstrates that beauty was not a neutral category but a racialized instrument of exclusion, linking whiteness to refinement and civilization while reducing Blackness to ugliness and immorality. In *The Bluest Eye,*

dramatizes how these historical forces shaped the intimate realm of family, school, and community, ultimately destroying Pecola's fragile sense of self. History and fiction are woven together in the novel, making it both a literary and a sociological testimony.

Through this comprehensive investigation, the research questions guiding the thesis can now be answered. To the first question, how does Morrison portray racism in its various forms? The analyses showed that she presents it as a structural, interpersonal, and internalized, each reinforcing the other to sustain a cycle of oppression. To the second question, how do white beauty standards function within the novel? The study concluded that they operate as a powerful mechanism of exclusion and violence, ensuring that Black characters, and especially women, see themselves as unworthy. To the third question: what larger message does the novel convey about identity and resistance? The answer lies in Morrison's dual focus on tragedy and critique: while Pecola goes to madness, her story is narrated in a way that forces readers to confront the cruelty of the cultural systems that destroyed her.

Nevertheless, like all research, this study remains limited in scope. While it explored racism in *The Bluest Eye* through theoretical, historical approaches, it could not exhaust all possible dimensions of Morrison's novel: further studies might expand the analyses by comparing *The Bluest Eye* with Morrison later works, such as *Beloved* or *Song Of Solomon*, to trace how she continues to grapple with race, history and identity across her career.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* remains a profoundly important work that merges history, theory, and lived experience into a haunting narrative about race, beauty and selfhood. Morrison masterfully exposes the hidden mechanism of racism while giving voice to those silenced by its violence. Pecola's tragic story is not only a personal tale of loss but also a symbolic commentary on the destructive ideals that continue to shape cultural perceptions of race and beauty. Ultimately, *The Bluest Eye* urges readers to recognize and resist the structures

that deny humanity to the marginalized, affirming Morrison's role as one of the most powerful voices in American literature. It is a novel that will continue to resonate, disturb and it provoke reflection for generations to come.

This dissertation has demonstrated that racism in *The Bluest Eye* functions on multiple, interconnected levels. Historically, it is rooted in the racial hierarchies of the 19th century America, where beauty standards, economic systems, and social institutions upheld white supremacy. On the interpersonal level, everyday interactions in the novel reflect the internalization of racial prejudice, reinforcing feeling of inferiority among African American characters. Structurally, the novel reveals how racism is deeply rooted in schools, communities, and on media that makes inequality last even without explicit acts of violence. Finally, Morrison exposes the psychological toll of these forces, showing how internalized racism destroy self perception, fuels identity crises, and contributes to generational trauma.

While this study has analysed *The Bluest Eye* in relation to historical context, beauty standards, and forms of racism, further research could be expand the scope in several ways. Comparative studies might examine Morrison's treatment of racism alongside other African American authors, such as Alice Walker or James Baldwin, to explore variations in narrative strategies and thematic focus. Future scholarship could also engaged with intersectional analyses, considering how racism interacts with gender, class, and colorism in Morrison's work. Also examining how contemporary media continues to reinforce or challenge the beauty ideals criticized in *The Bluest Eye* would provide interesting insight into the persistence of these cultural patterns.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* remains a powerful literary work that unmasks the destructive face of racism on identity, community and self-worth, by weaving together historical, structural, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions, Morrison

demonstrates that racism is not only an external system of oppression but also a deeply internalised force that corrodes individuals from within. Pecola Breedlove's tragedy is not just a personal story but also a reflection of the collective trauma experienced by African Americans living under the shadow of white supremacy.

This thesis has shown that beauty standards never neutral; they are historically constructed and racially coded, designed to privilege whiteness while marginalizing Blackness. Morrison's narrative challenges these norms and insists on the necessity of confronting how cultural ideas shape lived experiences. Beyond literary analyses, the novel speaks urgently to ongoing struggles with racism, representation, and the politics of beauty in contemporary society. Ultimately, the bluest eye compels readers to recognize the enduring impact of racial hierarchies and to imagine possibilities for resistance, healing, and redefinition of identity. Morrison's work is not only an artistic achievement but also a moral call to dismantle the destructive myths that continue to sustain racial inequality.

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