

Kasdi Merbah University-Ouargla  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of Letters and English Language



**Dissertation  
Academic Master**

Domain: Letters and Foreign Languages  
Field: English Language and Literature  
Specialty: Anglo-Saxon Literature

**Submitted by:**

Nour-El Imane HADJADJ and Soumia IATARIEN

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Master Degree in literary Studies  
Title**

**The Ideal Self versus the Real Self in  
Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: valorization of  
Black Females**

**Publicly defended  
on:**

02/05/2017

**Jury members**

Dr. Halima BENZOUKH	UKM-Ouargla	President
Dr. Mohammed Seghir HALIMI	UKM-Ouargla	Supervisor
Mr. Djelloul BOURAHILA	UKM-Ouargla	Examiner

**Academic Year: 2016/2017**

## Dedication

*To our parents*

*Our beloved family members*

*our friends*

*To whom we love*

## **Acknowledgment**

*First of all, all thanks go to the all mighty Allah for completing this work despite the hardships we faced. This dissertation would have never been accomplished without the help and patience of our supervisor who was a father more than a teacher.*

*We would like to thank our supervisor Dr. Halimi Mohammed Seghir for everything he has done for us, and for his patience and guidance.*

*We shall also express our deepest gratitude to our beloved parents who were the reason of our success and who have always shown great support, patience and love during our whole educational path especially this year. Words would never be enough to thank you.*

*Thanks to our dearest teacher Mr Kentaoui for his support, Mrs Saadoune for being a generous teacher and for believing in us and our dearest Moussa Ben Moussa thank you for every knowledge you shared and every present you brought.*

*We would like to thank the members of the Jury Mr Bourahla and Dr Benzoukh for their time and effort to examine our work.*

*A special thank you goes to Imane's siblings: Sabrina, Anes, Oussama and little Midou without forgetting Soumia's unique brother Rouaf.*

*We shall never forget the great help of Khalfi Amina, Khaoula Hakkoum, Baazizi houda and Salsabil Hamdiha you are the best.*

*Five years were tasteless without our special group who were more like a family and to every single person who knows us and helped us.*

*Thank you all for being there for us*

## **Abstract**

*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison represents the life of the African American females in the early twentieth century, who were deeply influenced by the beauty standards at that time. Living in a society of prejudice and injustice, women had suffered from racism and sexism. The black females used to be treated on the basis of their eye colors and skin pigmentation, rather than their deeds and intentions. Morrison's novel explores the racism exerted on the blacks, and shows the impact of the racist notion of beauty in relation to whiteness on identity construction and self-hatred. The story of Pecola portrays the worst effect of racism and double marginalization. Her ugliness was, unfortunately, the reason beyond her mistreatment by the world surrounding her. Her state of being rejected drug her into a blind alley in which she both got lost; she became more pessimistic to the point whereby she started developing a sort of hate to real identity which is, in her eyes, different from the one she aspires to possess (expected identity). This transformation at the level of her perception of her identity/ self is but the resultant of an abnormal perception of the woman. Beauty which is not, normally, based on physical appearance, has become the criterion of acceptance. Pecola, sees in blue-eyed girl a model of worth of trust and acceptance among and by the others. Morrison wants to put an accent on the necessity of self-satisfaction; for her, if women accepted themselves as they were, they would have imposed their ideas and themselves, and revalorized themselves, first originally Africans and as free African American women.

**Key terms:** beauty standards, racism, double marginalization, identity, real self, ideal self.

## **Abstract in French**

Le roman de Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* représente la vie des femmes afro-américaines au début du XXe siècle, énormément influencées par les normes de beauté de cette époque. Etant sujets aux préjugés et à l'injustice d'une société dite moderne, les femmes essayaient de se libérer de leur captivité psychologique embourbée de la ségrégation raciale et sexuelle. Les femmes de couleur ont toujours été traitées sur la base de leur couleur de peau et des yeux, plutôt que sur la base ou en fonction de leurs actes et intentions. Ce roman explore le racisme auquel les noirs étaient sujets, comme il conflict autour du critère de beauté attribué à la couleur de la peau. Un critère qui semble un déterminant irrationnel quant à la définition et la construction identitaire et par rapport à la haine de soi. L'histoire de Pecola dépeint l'effet émotionnel du racisme et les répercussions de la double marginalisation. La fillette a été mal traitée par tout le monde autour d'elle à cause de sa laideur. Le rejet, au qu'elle avait fait face, lui faisait détester sa véritable identité ou moi et désirait une autre identité qualifiant son soi idéal ; Une belle fille aux yeux bleus qui serait plus aimable est acceptée parmi les autres. Morrison veut mettre l'accent sur la nécessité de l'autosatisfaction, car si les femmes s'acceptent-elles telles quelles sont, elles s'imposeront, inéluctablement, à la société dont la nature mosaïque, et se revaloriseront, e revanche, en tant que femmes d'origines Africaines et, éventuellement, en tant que femmes Africaines-américaines libres.

**Les mots clés :** les normes de beauté, le racisme, la double marginalisation, l'identité, le véritable moi, un soi idéal.

## **Table of Contents**

### **Content**

<b>Dedication</b>	I
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	II
<b>Abstract in English</b>	III
<b>Abstract in French</b>	IV
<b>Table of Content</b>	V
<b>General Introduction</b>	1

### **Chapter 01: A Psycho-analytical Reading of The Bluest Eye**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	9
1.1 Literature as a psycho-therapy	10
1.2 Toni Morrison as a psycho-therapist	11
1.3 Pecola's self-image and the common social identity	13
1.4 Pecola's sense of Selfhood.	16
1.5 The embryonary self-confusion of Pecola.	17
<b>2. Conclusion</b>	22

### **Chapter 02: Race and gender issues of the minority groups**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	24
1.1 Issues of Minority Groups in America	25
1.2 Race, gender and class issues in America	27
1.3 Exploration of Racism in The Bluest Eye	28
1.4 The Miscellaneous feminist conception: White feminism Vs Black feminism	31
1.5 Morrison as a feminist writer	35
1.6 The character Pecola As a Doubly Marginalized Female	38
<b>2. Conclusion</b>	41

<b>General Conclusion</b>	42
---------------------------	----

<b>References</b>	44
-------------------	----

*General*

*Introduction*

## Introduction

In the Western society and precisely in the American society, minority groups have experienced several challenges to be considered as American individuals. Elisabeth Torfs stated in her dissertation *Alice Walker's Womanism Theory and Practice* that:

*Throughout the Years Western society, and the Western canon more specifically, have been challenged by different minority groups protesting their white, upper- and upper-middle-class, male bias" theory and practice (2008, p.1)*

Now, the question of the *self* is undoubtedly a question of self-confirmation. Minority groups have decided to highlight their issues through literature. The Jewish, Africans, the Latin as well as women saw that writing was the adequate way to manifest. For them, the issue of identity has been linked to a world of hopelessness and despair. The Americans had started questioning their very existence as American individuals. For them, the future is mysterious and the present is uncertain

This category of people went through very serious series of oppression, stigmatization and above all discrimination whatsoever; they were psychologically and physically tormented; they were morally depressed. Because of their state of invisibility and bewilderment, they have decided to exteriorize grievances and make their voice openly and widely heard. Precisely, The African- American authors saw themselves as both artists and political activists. Their works reflected their concerns regarding the political and social conditions of their countries that suffered from decolonization, racism and discrimination. Among the minority group writers, Toni Morrison, one of the main figures of this movement, is so daring and audacious to challenge the American society of the epoch when such conception

of women freedom was a taboo. Her novel *The Bluest Eyes* broke down the taboos in order to convey the message related to the way young black females were living, just because they were thought to be Ugly. Morrison stated that "As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she



was ugly, she would have to stay with these people” (p. 34). From a female perspective and from an Afro-American culture orientation, Morrison’s novel explores and redefines the concept of black beauty. The author said that:

*Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasure. (p.14).*

*The Bluest Eye* makes a contemptuous attack on the hassle of white standards of beauty on black women and the creation of cultural falsification. It presents a critic of dominant aesthetic that is internalized by majority of black community and attempts to review the male ethnicity which exercises a hegemonic control over the lives of black America. *The Bluest Eye* a powerful expression of Toni Morrison’s ethnic cultural feminism, a critic of black poverty, powerlessness and loss of positive self-image represented by Pecola who feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglect. *The Bluest Eye* is Toni Morrison’s troubling short novel which focuses on the lives of a traumatized and disempowered African- American family and the community in which they live. The book openly discusses a variety of social taboos carried out by various members of a Black community in Lorain, Ohio. The most disturbing being the rape of a young Black girl, resulting in pregnancy by her father.

Research problem:

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* explores the effects of race and gender issues on the young black female’s identities. Thus, this dissertation deals with females’ identity crises and the effect of double marginalization on identity construction. This research is carried out to investigate the issue of identity of the black female in *the bluest eye* and the author’s effort to challenge the vertical standard of beauty to create an alternative horizontal standard through which all women are viewed on the basis of internal beauty instead of a physical one for the latter is ephemeral while the former is immortal. This raises many questions which deserve a thorough scrutiny like:

1. How do race and gender discrimination influence the identity and the well-being of the African American female?
2. Why does a child-girl think of substituting a new identity for her real one?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to put forward the following statements around which the present work gravitates. These statements are in fact hypotheses which are formulated with reference to the already set research questions.

1. Race and gender discrimination cause a confused identity in which one wishes to be another one.
2. Being a black young girl within a black family is not secure enough, therefore, a seek for an alternative secure shelter among the white people becomes a prerequisite necessity.

Race and gender discrimination have been a devastating issue for the Afro-American women who have been mistreated and marginalized because of their skin pigmentation and their gender. These factors urged them to question their own identity and look for a better substitute for it because they believe white skin is the only attribute for and criterion of beauty.

Pecola used to live in a society where everyone praises the whites at the detriment and the expense of the blacks. As a kid, she has long been neglected and denigrated by her own parents especially her mother Ms. Breedlove. Being a black young girl within a black family is not secure enough, consequently, a seek for an alternative secure shelter among the white became a necessity for the little child.

To develop the above-mentioned points, we have seen necessary to divide our dissertation into two major chapters which are entitled respectively: *A Psycho-analytical Reading of The Bluest Eye* and *Race and gender issues within the minority groups*. The first one unveils the inner conflicts of the character of the novel, especially the protagonist Pecola, and the second chapter deals with the effect of racial and gender discrimination of the black females,

The novel of Toni Morrison deals with identity issues of the African American women who struggle to prove themselves in a society where they feel psychologically disturbed owing to their state of despair. The author highlights the subject of the concept of beauty and its importance in Identity construction of children and particularly young girls. In this sense, a need for both psychological and a feminist approach is important to understand how does the unconscious work when the infants go through a stage in life where an external image of the body produces a psychic response creating a mental illustration of an 'I'. Therefore, the theory of Lacan 'mirror stage' to understand the psychological state of the protagonist (Pecola) seems as well important. This theory is applied to subtly read, analyze and introspecting the character's mind and thus understand psyche of the Breedloves, specifically Pecola since she lacks the affection of her family.

Another theory is also adopted. The feminism theory helps demonstrate the imposition of white standards of beauty on black women and the creation of cultural perversion through *The Bluest Eye* which represents the powerlessness and loss of positive self-image of the protagonist Pecola who feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglect.

The choice of *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison was not arbitrary. It is because the writer is a brave writer who challenged the Western society by breaking the conventional rules of beauty standards. We believe she had broken out new ground in terms of the way she deals with the theme of woman discrimination. Therefore, we became eager to understand and explore her novel. The task is so challenging for it is a new experience for us to delve into the maze of the African American issues and conflicts. Thus, from the very first reading we have decided to work on this topic. The reading process had an effect on us as ordinary woman readers: we found ourselves completely involved despite the cultural differences are social realities. In reality, we astonished by the factual events Morrison has provided the readers with. We confirm, as female readers, we could sense the agony of females of the other race.

*Chapter one*

***A Psycho-analytical Reading of the Bluest***

***Eye***

# ***Chapter 01: A Psycho-analytical Reading of The Bluest Eye***

## ***1. Introduction***

*1.1 Literature as a psycho-therapy*

*1.2 Toni Morrison as a psycho-therapist*

*1.3 Pecola's self-image and the common social identity*

*1.4 Pecola's sense of Selfhood*

*1.5 The embryonary self-confusion of Pecola*

## ***2. Conclusion***

## Introduction

Identity, gender-bias, slavery, and marginalization, have been the major issues in African-American society. Through *The Bluest Eye*, the author explores the question of what it means to be an African in a racist society where the blacks are marginalized and disrespected because of their skin pigmentation and gender. She scrutinizes the imposition of white standards of beauty on black women and the psychological damages it created to them, leading them to lose their positive self-image. The protagonist of the novel (Pecola) used to live in a society where the whites are more privileged than the blacks. The little girl had a hard childhood where she was mistreated by everyone around her including her own parents. These factors led her to yearn not just for blue eyes, but to be white in order to be accepted and loved in her society. She was brought up in a set- presumption influenced by the white standards of beauty. this chapter will examine the psychological state of being and the inner conflicts of the characters of this novel, especially the protagonist Pecola who feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglect. Morrison through her novel *the bluest Eye* explored the African American women's response to institutionalized racism and sexism and the influences of white values on the lives of African Americans that prevented them from creating their own self and leading them to question their own identity. So, the author challenged this acceptance of these values by black community and by the white community as well, through suggesting that personal growth, family and community should be more highly valued.

## 1.1.Literature and psycho-therapy

There is a close connection between the field of psychology and literature. The two disciplines are seemingly different but in fact they intertwine. The first one deals with the observation of human behaviours while literature studies and analyses how human beings behave in dealing with their problems and environment. The psychology of literature studies the psychological state of the writer and the characters as a type and as individuals; Wellek stated in his book *theory of literature* that:

*The poet is the “possessed”: he is unlike other men, at once less and more; and the unconscious men, at once less and more; and the unconscious out of which he speaks is felt to be at once sub- and super-rational. (1978,p.75).*

His creativity which is the unconscious factor and reader & psychology the poet is a day-dreamer who is socially validated. Instead of altering his character, he perpetuates and publishes his phantasies.

Sigmund Freud and Lacan had influenced literature in many ways. His own widest influences assemble both science and literature (Ellenberger 1970) and, with them, the influences that produce the psychology of modernism as a whole. There is a wide connection between literature and psychotherapy. The latter includes literature in the training of a psychotherapist by delving into an exploration of the multifarious influence of literature on psychotherapy and vice versa. This is in order to project the healing virtues of literary creativity and its significant impact on the psychological practices of the psychotherapist.

Psychotherapy deals with the healing of the mental deficiencies in individuals or groups. Since it involves the interaction between a trained professional and the clients, it is expedient that relationship is built and trust established before the therapist can have access to the inner factors influencing the condition of the patient. Literary expression triggers the outflow of repressed feelings and ideas which the patient might not be able to release in ordinary

communication. It helps the psychotherapist to know how to approach individual case and purge the mind of his client.

Many psychotherapists are oblivious of the central role of literature in their profession. A critical evaluation of the connection between literature and psychotherapy will radically change the perspective of practitioners who would have ordinarily subscribed to the belief that these two professions have no possible relation. A consciousness of the close affinity between the two fields will be tremendously impactful on the critical consciousness of practitioners. Fundamentally, literature mirrors life, and since the relationship between the patient and psychotherapist is a life occurrence, the influence of literature is inevitable. There is an undeniable symbiotic relationship between the two, as efficient literary skill is required of a therapist in his profession.

### **1.2. Toni Morrison as a psycho-therapist**

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* deals with many sensitive issues such as racism, discrimination as well as rape. Her major focus is more on the leading factors to state anxiety which is one of the immediate consequences of incestuous acts in the text such as the rape of Pecola Breedlove by her father Cholly. Describing the scene of rape, Morrison said:

*The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours toward her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke the tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. (Ibid, p.162)*

To enhance more this point, it would be wise to refer to Frieda Macteer's stimulating experience by Mr. Henry and causing her to believe that she is ruined. The dialogue between her and her sister Claudia unveils other situations of incestuous acts, as follows:

*Frieda: He...picked at me."*

*Claudia: "Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?"*

*Frieda: "Sort of."*

*Claudia: "He showed his privates to you?"*

*Frieda: "Noooo. He touched me."*

*Claudia: "Where?"*



*Frieda: "Here and here." She pointed to her tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress. (p. 99).*

Through showing this incestuous scene of rape, the author tries to underline a very reality of the African-American woman who had been underdone and who had been sexually exploited for many decades since first slave trait. Sumana stated in her book *The Novels of Toni Morrison: A Study in Race, Gender, and Class*. That:

*Clearly, sexism and racism are systems of societal and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of African-American women. Since sex and race have been so interrelated in the history of America, it is not surprising that when black women published novels, they necessarily reflected that relationship. (1998, p. 62)*

Morrison talks also about racism, discrimination and incest which is the primary focus of the writing because Morrison wanted to demonstrate how it is "inevitably" harmful to the child. The author wanted to shed light, through *The Bluest Eye*, on what has been and still a taboo in the African American society. As she herself puts it in her Afterword that "this is a terrible story about things one would rather not know anything about"(p.213)

*The Bluest Eye* is considered by many writers and critics such as Christopher Bollen as one of her bravest works. It is thought to be psychoanalytic in content, due to the fact that some critics examine the mental state of the characters before and after the rape. Morrison said that she wanted the readers to feel as though they were "co-conspirators" with the rapist. In order to do this Morrison took pains to ensure that she never portrayed the actions of the characters as wrong in order to show how everyone has his own problems. Morrison even goes so far as to use words such as "friendly," "innocent," and "tender," to soften the damages while the rape is in progress". She is undoubtedly aware that she will be criticised for deconstructing a certain number of literary taboos with its honest representation of the American girlhood. Raynor Deidre and Buttler Johnella mentioned in their book, "*Morrison and The Critical Community*" that:

*Critical responses to Morrison's work focus on her audience, stylistic technique, and major themes, and explore the role she plays as a precursor to new voices in American literature, especially African American women's literature. (2007, pp. 175-183)*

Morrison is the first author to introduce readers to a progression of each character's live and mental state prior to his misdeeds, most notably the rape of Pecola. By allowing her audience a glimpse into the psyche of Pecola and her parents traumatic and shameful upbringings, Morrison attempts to show how society and community are as much at fault if not more for the events that led up to Pecola's rape as her parents were. She brought forth awareness to a well-known secret, that has claimed thousands of victims, and showcase how society's disempowerment of a people whether real or imagined is also at the root of continuous traumatic events occurring within certain familial structures, often lasting for generations, and how incest is the most destructive of all taboos to a family unit above all else.

### **1.3. Pecola's self-image and the common social identity**

*The Bluest Eyes* is a tragic story that depicts the theme of beauty standards in the African American society. Pecola, the main character of the novel is the major victim of this theme. Her life situation is very difficult for she lacks the affection of her parents especially her mother because "she is ugly". Her mother Ms Breedlove doesn't put any effort towards her daughter or her home. All her cares are centered on her job which is working as maid at a white person's domestic in which she praises the owner's daughter for being a quite blond. The most heart-breaking scene in this story is when Cholly, Pecola's father, rapes her while she is washing dishes. Due to this event, Pecola reaches her breaking point and hits complete insanity.

Pecola's issue with her identity can be better understood when we take a look at this novel through a psychoanalytic lens. Lacan says that infants go through a stage in life where an external image of the body produces a psychic response creating a mental illustration of the "I". This created image is given either by a literal reflection in a mirror or given to the infant through his mother.

Lacan's idea explains that the infant will identify with the image which supplies as the form of the infant's emerging view of selfhood. However, because of the under developed

physical vulnerability of the infant, the image of the self does not correspond with it; meaning the “image” is recognized as an “ideal-I”.

Lacan states that the “mirror stage” designs the ego as essentially dependent upon the external objects. As the infant grows begins to enter into social relations, he uses language. The language of others will become more complex throughout the individual’s life through social and linguistic frameworks, giving the individual its specific characteristics. Lacan argued in his book entitled *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function* (1989) that:

*It is his moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into being mediated by the other’s desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other People, and turns the ‘I’ into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process.* (1989, p.1127)

The process of the structure of the self as a social identity starts at the mirror stage and brings to completion only with the resolution of the Oedipal Crisis. Essentially by following Freud’s stages of oral, anal, and genital, Lacan’s “mirror stage” follows the stages of real, imaginary, and symbolic. At infancy, the infant only has a sense of self and is a state of need, this is the stage of real. As the latter develops it reaches the imaginary stage where gaining access to language begins to create identification and the “ideal I”.

These stages both lead to the symbolic stage where the individual has matured enough to understand language and that language creates the desire to become the “ideal I”. The image has to come before the individual is established. You have to see yourself before you can identify yourself. It is Lacan’s belief that the crucial at which the child gives up the mother as a love object and attaches to the father marks his exit from “the imaginary” and entrance into “the symbolic”. Unfortunately for Pecola she never emerges from the imaginary stage to the symbolic stage. She had a difficult time moving from the pre-Oedipal due to lack of voice and nourishment in her life as a child. Elizabeth Abel emphasized this in her work *Race, Class and Psychoanalysis? Opening Questions? Conflicts in Feminism* (1990). She said that:

*the story that Morrison tells provides a version of psychoanalytic narrative that represents the mother as the irreducible matrix of the child's development, the unachievable object of a desire that cannot know but must forever seek its origin. (p.208)*

The fact that Pecola calls her mother Mrs. Breedlove and not mama highlights the permanent absence of “mother” in Pecola’s psychic life. It is obvious that Mrs. Breedlove does not have a good relationship with her daughter, especially in the scene when Frieda and Claudia goes to Mrs. Breedlove’s work to visit Pecola and they spill the pie in front of the little girl that Mrs. Breedlove tends to like. When the pie is spilt, she yells at Pecola but calms down the “little blond girl” asking her to “hush, don’t worry none”. (pp.108-9)

Mrs. Breedlove never had much of an attachment to Pecola, even from birth she referred to her as ugly. This affects Pecola immensely in her real stage. As an infant, the child is in need of love and affection to create a sense of self. From the beginning, Mrs. Breedlove creates a negative sense of self for Pecola. Because of the lack of love from her mother, she tries to fill the void by identifying with the image of the other. The fact that Morrison does not portray Mrs. Breedlove as a loving maternal figure in Pecola’s life, it is anticipated that the little girl will turn her desire for love and satisfaction to identify with the image of the other. Her pitiful desire for love is resolved in her significant image of the Imaginary identification Shirley Temple.

Shirley Temple is the epitome of beauty and everyone loves her, because of this, Pecola believes in order to be loved she needs to look like Shirley Temple. She desires some milk in blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. Morrison stated in the novel that: “Pecola was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face”. (p. 19)

Lacan claims that the desires we have come from the desire of the Other. Because of this, Pecola shifts her desire for the mother not to the image of her breast (milk) but to the image of Shirley Temple. All this leads the little girl to become mad and question herself and her own identity.

#### 1.4. Pecola's sense of Selfhood

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is likely to redefine beauty and identity crisis that make a sense of self-hate and inferiority in the mind of the black women. The author explores the question of what it is meant to be an African in a racist capitalist white society. She portrays characters who accept white values and those who refuse them like Pecola Breedlove who yearns not just for blue eyes, but to be white as well. The narrator narrates that:

*Here was an ugly little black girl asking for beauty...A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. (p.174).*

Creating the self, a step in the process of embracing personalism, entails a struggle for growth. Characters attempt to develop themselves through self-awareness; they became conscious of their psychological requirements such as thoughts, emotions, desires to mention just a few.

In their attempt to seek truth and happiness for themselves and their families, they have decided to become responsible for themselves and their actions. They have, as well, learned the way how to acquire certain knowledge of themselves and their experiences, and of the others' experience. Pecola's eager desire to possess blue eyes translates the character's quest for the subversion of human nature. Her quest for whiteness as a symbol of beauty is synonymous to the rejection of blackness as a symbol of ugliness, and thus the societal rejection. About Pecola, in a book entitled Toni Morrison, Samuels and Clenora said that:

*she experiences damage from her abusive and negligent parents. The reader is told that even Pecola's mother thought she was ugly from the time of birth. Pecola's negation may have initially been caused by her family's failure to provide her with identity, love, security, and socialization, all which are essential for any child's development. (1990,p.13).*

Quest for identity is a defeating issue in the minds of great African American intellectuals. With their creative imagination and American ingenuity, they closely analyse the theme of the

loss and search for identity. They are aware that the black have been reduced to conformists by society and that the tragedy of modern black women is that they fail to recognise their own. The black women have lost their dignity not because they have laid claim to powers beyond their scope and ability but because they have relegated their rights and responsibilities.

#### **1.4. The Embryonary Self-confusion of Pecola**

Morrison's fiction gravitates around the themes of self-division and self-confusion; in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, she depicts the negative effect of mainstream cultures exerted on the African Americans who have been the victims of the racist white masters who have ill-treated them since ages; they have been suffering and bearing the brunt of racism. In her novel, Morrison tried to unveil the issues and the plight of the black woman to show the way how her community had been struggling for survival. Her novels deal with the sufferings, dishonour and mistreatment of the Blacks, particularly, Black females. The author said that: "There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time." (p. 10)

Morrison sheds light on the impact of psychological traumatic events that lead to the self-division as well as the destruction of the female adolescent's self and her struggle for psychic totality in a world of cruelty and prejudice, Morrison added that "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment". (p. 17)

The adolescent's fragile identity represents the terrible torment that the marginalized self has to cope with to become a true human being accepted among the society. Pecola was found self-hated and separated from her real identity as a result of the mainstream western beauty standards. Such rejection from her own flesh and blood as well as her environment traumatized and emotionally paralyzed young Pecola.

The two main deterministic drives in Pecola's young life are her mother and father, Cholly and Pauline Breedlove. Significantly, Pecola has never called neither her mother mom nor her father dad; she confirms serious internal detachment between the young girl and the parents; the narrator said that: *Pecola, like Sammy and Cholly, always called her mother Mrs. Breedlove.* (p.43). The author emphasises this very detachment when she said:

*If [I] looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they would say, 'Why look at pretty eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty [blue] eyes* (p.46).

The Breedloves, their turn, were also tragically traumatized and psychologically disturbed; they lost themselves in their quest for their identities. In an article entitled *Quest for Identity in The Bluest Eye- Toni Morrison*, Thamoas K Fernandissaid that;

*Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, and Pauline Breedlove and all are embodiments of this quest for identity, as well as symbols of the quest of many of the Black Northern newcomers of that time. (2012, p.04)*

While Cholly, the drunk father who works in a coal mine, was unable to provide a comfortable life for his family and the mother Pauline used to spend more money on her looks to feel more convenient for the white society, the unfortunate daughter Pecola felt a prey to her father's violence and her mother's cruelty and eventually sunk in the parents' carelessness towards her, their indifference regarding her feeling and emotions. Pecola's psychological state of mind made her yearn for blue eyes, for another identity and for an ideal ego. Yet the fact that she lives in a white overriding society urged her to exert great efforts to fulfil her ideal-self in vain, drugging her into a state of struggle and of confusion between her actual self and her ideal ego. This lead her to be fixed at the level of the mirror stage. Ding Yang stated in his article *Tragedy of the self-splitting—A psychological reading of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye that*

*Under such a hostile environment, they are mentally forced to linger in their prolonged mirror stage and this is just the reason for their self-splitting. The Breedloves are stuck in the permanent contradiction of the Mirror Stage, and the insurmountable conflict between their ideal ego and their real life sets the tone for their tragic life.* (2010)

Pecola used to live an old weary lady's life in a little girl's body; her pains would not seem to heal unless she gets blue eyes. This psychological state of mind and being is the resultant of certain conditions among which one could mention hatred, ignorance, mistreatment as no body and most importantly her mother's tendency towards and attachment to white race, she mentioned that:

*Crazy foo...my floor, mess ...look what you...get on out...crazy...crazy...my floor, my floor....' Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries. The little [white] girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her. 'Hush, baby, hush. Don't cry no more (p. 109).*

Pecola asserted that she is a true ugliness after the rape of her father who is supposed to protect her. He gave up his role as a parent and turned; instead, into a hideous monster who completely damaged his own progeniture. Little Pecola went insane, she is no longer the same. She lost her self in looking for her ideal self. The Breedloves were mentally and psychologically disordered which made them live with a pseudo-identity, an identity that is never theirs. In this context and in *Pseudo identity in Toni Morrison's the bluest eye and Sula Vijay.D. Songire* shows that:

*The quest for identity of the female characters like Pecola, Pauline, results into their fractured psyche. They lead life in a psychological trauma. The pseudo identity they embrace brings their fall and tragic end too. (2016.vol3. issue 10).*

In fact, the Breedloves failed in completing their identity formulation and thus they have fallen in the pseudo-identity because of their trauma that seemed unhealable. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud accounts for the wound of the mind which is different from the physical damage he says:

*it is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors. (1920, p.4).*

Morrison delved in the issue of the psychological trauma in relation to self-division within the Breedloves, emphasizing on the psychic distress that is caused by the social oppressions minorities experienced as a consequence of racism and sexism in ethnic America.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter provides a psychological analysis of the protagonist Pecola who had a stressful and a confusing childhood that provoked her madness and lead her to question her own identity. She lived in a racist society where the whites were more praised and respected while the blacks were neglected and ill-treated. The little child grew up lacking the affection and love of her family specifically her own mother who have never loved her and kept calling her ugly. In this chapter, we attempted to investigate the issue of the self and identity crises that Pecola went through during her embryonary stage by applying the theory of Lacan 'mirror stage' to understand the psychological state of the little child and the psyche of the Breedloves and to explain how can trauma and shock result in serious psychological issues that eventually turns into lunacy.

## *Chapter Two*

### ***Race and gender issues of the minority groups***

## ***Chapter Two: Race and Gender Issues Within The Minority Groups***

### ***Introduction***

1.1 *The minorities conflicts in America*

1.2 *Race, gender and class issues in America*

1.3 *Exploration of Racism in The Bluest Eye*

1.4 *The Miscellaneous feminist conception: White feminism Vs  
Black feminism*

1.5 *Morrison as a feminist*

1.6 *The character Pecola As a Doubly Marginalized Female*

### **2. Conclusion**

## Introduction

Literature of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century portrays the life of marginalized Afro-American minorities and more precisely, life of double marginalized females who experienced both racism and sexism. Morrison was one of the writers who could reveal this social reality to the world through her novel *The Bluest Eye*. The main characters of the novel are females who were physically and psychologically tormented from their societies and males of their own race. Morrison as a feminist and a womanist tried to highlight the impact of western standards of beauty on black females and called for racial and gender equality taking into consideration that blackness is not ugliness and whiteness is not beauty. The author through her work urges black females to accept their fate and love themselves, as she blames the American society for such standards for they have condemned the African American females to ugliness and self-hatred. This chapter will tackle the conflicts ethnic groups have faced in order to establish a racism-free society. Race and gender oppressions destroyed the personality of black females as Pecola and her mother Pauline who gave up themselves instead of standing for their rights of living peacefully and in harmony with societies of other races since the American community is rich of paradoxes. The author has attempted to raise the social awareness of females of her race to such self-destructive ideologies through her first novel *The Bluest Eye*.

## 1.1.The Minorities Conflicts in America

In ethnic America, literature had a huge impact on minority groups the question of the self was the main issue, it was seen to be essentially linked to a world of despair and hopelessness. The issue of identity and the individual's self-identity are a quest for self-recognition and re-consideration that lead the individual to question the concrete contradiction of the real world to his own contempt with the place he is relegated to by his own existence. The African Americans and The Jewish Americans had started questioning their very existence as American individuals. For minority groups, the future is mysterious and the present is haphazardly uncertain. This category of people went through very serious series of oppression, stigmatisation and above all discrimination whatsoever; they were psychologically and physically tormented; they were morally depressed. Ludwig von Mises expressed in his book (1951) that "All rational action is in the first individual action. Only the individual thinks. Only the individual reasons. Only the individual acts." (p.113)

During the modern period, the experience of the minority group character in America does play a part in creating and sustaining its paradox. It is most notably Native Africans and African Americans who have been victimized on the grounds of their skin colour and have suffered a double jeopardy due to the intersection of race, class and gender. Racism, Sexism and Classism signify the traumatic conditions, the author said that:

*Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. (p.29)*

The writers decided to highlight their issues, and saw that writing was the adequate way to manifest. They wanted to substitute a horizontally transcended idealized self for a vertically transcended real self. For a great many of African Americans, men and women alike, literature has become an "important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality, racism and social injustice. We take as example African American writers such (Richard Wrights),

Black Women writers such as (Toni Morrison) and Jewish American (Saul Bellow). The political, economic and social changes that marked the transition into the 20<sup>th</sup> century created a worldwide instability. America was no exception to this general trend. The consequences of WWI and the collapse of the economic system falsified whatever truth man can hold and degraded whatever value he would maintain.

The general trends, in literature during the early decades of the 20th century, were focused on presenting the, alienated, estranged and anxious individuals who were caught in the strain of circumstances, searching for their own identity to find a genuine affirmation for the “self”. The impact of stigmatization suffered by the African in America caused them to suffer the arbitrary arrest, distress and mal-adjustment to harsh conditions of modern America. Among the minority group writers, Toni Morrison, or as her birth certificate declares, Chloe Ardelia Wofford, is one of the main figures of this movement, was so daring and audacious to challenge the American society of the epoch when such conception of women freedom was a taboo. Her novel *The Bluest Eyes* broke down the taboos in order to convey the message related to the way how young black females are living, just because they are thought to be Ugly. Morrison, about her character Pecola, says that: “As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people” (p. 34).

Morrison’s novel explores and redefines, from a female perspective, the concept of black beauty from an Afro-American culture orientation. The author stated that:

*Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs-all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. (p.14)*

## **1.2.Race, gender and class issues in America**

The most disappointing aspect of human progress and our civilization is that some of us cannot accept others as they are. Class, colour and culture always differentiate the human society. Instead of appreciating the differences to our advantage, we struggle to suppress and destroy others.

The void between the rich and the poor, the differences between blacks and whites and the drift between man and woman are clearly noticeable. In the name of this class, race and gender some invisible hand is always playing the dice. Racism began in America when white masters brought the African slaves in chains and used them as laborers to work on plantation farms to fill their coffers. Later on the black laborers weren't considered humans by the white world and were reduced to a 'body, 'a profit making 'body.' The basic myth of racism is that white skin brings with it cultural superiority. The whites were considered more intelligent and worthy than the blacks. Blackness was related to sin, dirt and cultural inferiority.

Racism, Sexism and Classism signify the traumatic conditions under which African-Americans live in white America. These are systems of social and psychological oppression that have harshly affected the lives of blacks in general and African-American women in particular.

Black Community had to face atrocities like racism, exploitation, sex abuse to mention just a few. However, black women were more oppressed physically and mentally and their cause of grievances was greater. Pushed to the periphery on account of their gender, a black woman's life was full of horrors. The woman in America is expected to be beautiful in an ornamental way, she did not work for a living and was 'pure', 'religious 'and married. The Black woman was an obsolete anti-thesis of this image- she was not ornamental and according to the aesthetics of the country she was not beautiful. Moreover, most of these women had to work for a living.

Class exploitation is perhaps the greatest source of oppression of blacks in White America. The class issue is an important one as it is linked to Capitalism, the system which

divides society into two classes: 'master' and 'slaves.' The whites have been the Monopoly Class under this system while the blacks have been the Marginal Class. The blacks have suffered due to their status in society, as a poor, marginal group. The black women, like the black men were also working women. The latter had to work on plantation farms as laborers and also as "mammies" or maids in the kitchens of the white households. They were generally looked upon as servants. It is, however, important to note that race, class and gender have been inter-related in the history of black women. They, in fact, originated from the same set of circumstances and are motivated by economic, social and psychological forces. Gloria Wade Gyles stated that:

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

### **1.3.Exploration of racism in the bluest eye**

Race and racism are complicated issues in *The Bluest Eye*. Unlike typical portrayals of racism, involving white hatred against blacks, *The Bluest Eye* primarily explores the issue of racism occurring between people of color. The characters experience some instances of oppression; however, Racism exists internally within each of them, within families and the immediate community that they are exposed to. The black community in the novel has been forced to accept beauty standards in order to be accepted. They are exposed to beauty icons such as Shirley Temple.

*She desires some milk in blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. Pecola was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face (p.19)*

Claudia is a character who senses the destructive attitudes of everyone in the 40's. She is considered rebellious in the way in which she destroys her white doll. This can also be seen



when she imagines Pecola's baby to be beautiful. She is the only character that we can call open minded and sees more than what is shown to her.

Racism also affects the characters in indirect ways such as: The overarching general implications that the great depression had on black people compared to the relative affluence of the whites, reminding us of the interlinked themes of Race and Class. More directly: The sexual violation of Pecola by her own father is connected to the sexual violation of Cholly by the whites who are imposing their power in the society onto him. Morrison inserts the 'Dick & Jane' narrative as a primer to show the audience the pre-set values that exist within the black community and their mindset. We immediately realize that there is a gap between the ideal, upper-middle-class lives of 'Dick & Jane' and the 'ugly' life. Arguably Morrison doesn't imply that the 'white' life is better but instead this is just used to show us the internalized white 'Dick & Jane' values within the black characters that make them unhappy. This also creates irony between the 'Dick & Jane' narrative and the novel. As it is shown in the novel “To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane”. (p.50).

Whiteness is seen to be associated with beauty and cleanliness (especially in context to Geraldine and Mrs Breedlove). However, Morrison shows a contrasting view: Mrs Breedlove's happiest memories (making love to Cholly) are in the form of 'Yellow, green and purple memories'. This imagery could be seen to emphasize the irony in the black community as they prioritize whiteness when in fact vibrant colour rather than white (absence of colour) could be seen as a stronger image of happiness.

The motif of 'dirtiness' and 'cleanliness' are stereotypically linked in the novel to 'Black'. This idea of 'dirty-black' is explored as this was the mindset of the 40's. These links are explicit when Geraldine and Mrs Breedlove are excessively cleaning all the time. Although Mrs Breedlove only really is concerned with cleanliness when cleaning her employer's house, perhaps she feels her own house is unfixable. This fixated attempt at cleaning could be described as the

black women's best but futile attempt at ridding herself of the dirt around her as perhaps she feels as though her colour itself is dirty enough.

The general sense of instability present in the black community during the Great Depression, in contrast to the privileged circumstances the whites are presented in the novel, reinforces the connection between race and class. In addition, the fact that Pecola is molested by her own father, Cholly, mirrors the sexual violation of him by the whites who view his loss of virginity as entertainment, “go on nigger, make it good” (p58). This event has changed Cholly significantly and that surprisingly at that moment of shame he did not loathe the white men, “*he hated the girl*”

Something rather prominent, that the *Bluest Eye* explores, is the relationship between race and beauty, or ugliness. The novel extensively explores how the dominant racial group's perspective on beauty and appearance serves to degrade and humiliate other races.

The dominant racial group in question are the whites, the white standards of beauty are imposed and forced upon the black race, as such they are described as ‘accepting rejection as legitimate, and self-evident’ by Toni Morrison herself in the foreword. With such standards of beauty and appearance being forced onto the Afro-American community, many feel as if they are unable to live up to such standards and thus many develop a ‘powerful self-loathing’.

In reality, Pecola Breedlove is presented as an example of the worst consequences of racial self-loathing. Everybody that encounters her do not consider her beautiful, she, herself does not find herself attractive nor beautiful – suggesting at the extent of white superiority thus resulting in a sort of ‘internalized racial loathing’. Even her own race does not seem to consider her beautiful, suggesting at the extremity of ‘racial loathing’ and of course the result of the so called ‘powerful self-loathing’, Geraldine quietly calls Pecola a ‘nasty little black bitch’, though this could be seen as out of anger of thinking Pecola killing her son's cat, but the fact that she

directly refers to her race and skin colour with disgust links her hatred for Pecola more with her race and physical features than the fact that Pecola had supposedly killed her son's cat.

#### **1.4.The Miscellaneous Feminist Conception: White Feminism versus Black Feminism**

Critics see Feminism as a set of political, social and economic movements and ethical philosophies that aimed at establishing equal rights for males and females, as well as it is highly concerned with theories of issues of gender differences seeking liberation from the patriarchal dominance over women. Aldridge stated, in his book entitled *Towards Integrating Africana Women into Africana Studies* (2003), that:

*Feminism is female-centred and revolves around the empowerment of the female in a patriarchal society. It also focuses on equality across the board for men and women. Black Feminism, on the other hand, is family-centred* (2003, p. 193).

The 1960s' American women were not expected to give much to their country other than cooking, cleaning and raising kids. Their job outdoors was also restricted to teaching and nursing. Women carried the full load of housekeeping and children responsibilities. Moreover, a woman's relationship with her husband was more like an "head and master laws", she had no right to spend her husband's money or to control any of his properties, paradoxically, he had the legal right to do whatever he wants with his wife's earnings and properties. Coontz, Stephanie stated in her book *a Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* that: "The female doesn't really expect a lot from life. She's here as someone's keeper — her husband's or her children's". (2011, p.42)

Working women were subjected to inequality as they were paid less than males of the same occupation. Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* depicted the despair of some educated housewives who felt unfulfilled, incomplete and totally used.

*I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bed maker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I? (1963, p.117)*

Friedan in this book contradicts the notion that women are happy indoors serving their families, living beneath the mercy of their husbands. She showed how women are excluded, exploited, and suppressed.

Feminism, therefore is the notion that appeared to deal with all political and social authoritarianisms, it emphasizes on the female empowerment in a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, feminism spot lights the female issues from white women perspective. Gender inequality was white women's main concern. However, Feminists were criticized for focusing on their issues mainly and putting black females on the margin. Hence, in America, being both black and female was much challenging and unbearable; unlike black males, women were not only oppressed by whites but also by males belonging to the same racial constellation. Alice Walker argued that "black women are undeniably different from their black male and white female "allies". (2008, p.14).

Throughout the years and after the emergence of the feminist movement, Afro-American women were the muzzled part of society, they were unheard, unseen and unloved; they are as Showalter called them "the silenced partner" (1997, p. 214). Feminism serves the rights of white women who are asking for gender equality by having equal chances of work, payment, and appreciation, whereas, the African minority females were striving for survival among males of their race and women of the other races. Sexism and Racism made females belong to nowhere, they are recognized neither as pure American females nor as Black African females, consequently they were found "doubly marginalized" which makes their experience unique. Smith claims that:

*black women experience a unique form of oppression in discursive and non-discursive practices alike because they are victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism. (1997, p.317).*

Women of color do not necessarily feel the same as white women towards men; white women see men as enemies while black females want their femininity to be recognized. Black feminism, therefore, is the recognition that black women have been troubled by sexism and racism, that there was a failure to identify and address these issues in the Feminist Movement and the Black Liberation Movement, and that women of color have their own concern that neither movement can undertake. Black Feminism focuses on the experiences, needs, and desires of colored females. Hooks states that:

*It is obvious that most Black men are not in positions that allow them to exert the kind of institutionalized patriarchal power and control over Black women's lives that privileged white men do in this society. But it is undeniable that they do exert a lot of power over Black women and children in everyday life. (1992, p.124)*

Both Western feminism and Black feminism share some characteristics such as standing for the rights of women in general. Yet Western feminism was not able to completely account for the experiences of black women; it would be required, then, to find other terminologies that could bear the weight of those experiences. It is in this regard that Alice Walker's *womanism* mediates to make an important contribution, as she marked in the New York Times Magazine in 1984:

*I don't choose womanism because it is 'better' than feminism ... I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it; because I cherish the spirit of the women (like Sojourner) the word calls to mind, and because I share the old ethnic-American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe behavior and change that only a new word can help it more fully see (Walker, 1984, p.94)*

Alice Walker as a pioneer of the black feminism movement, coined the term Womanism in her assembly of essays entitled “*In Search of Our Mothers’*”, (1984). At the beginning of the collection she gives a definition of this “feminist, Afro centric, healing, embodied, and spiritual” (p.17). Although Walker does not alienate womanism from feminism, yet, she suggested another term to feminism to capture its complexity. Despite Walker's claims to the opposing, she

suggests in her definitions of womanism (e.g., "womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender") that the womanist/black woman is tougher and greater than the feminist/white woman

Walker's structuring of womanism and the different meanings she invests in it, is an attempt to give the black woman a position in history and culture and at the same time release her from the negative and inaccurate stereotypes that underestimate her in American society. Although Walker does not alienate womanism from feminism, however, she suggested another term to feminism to capture its complexity. Despite Walker's claims to the opposing, she suggests in her definitions of womanism "womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender" that the womanist/black woman is tougher and greater than the feminist/white woman. She believes that the word is much stronger in reflecting the principles of this movements, she says that,

*'Womanist' encompasses 'feminist' as it is defined in Webster's, but also means instinctively pro- woman. It is not in the dictionary at all. Nonetheless, it has a strong root in black women's culture.... An advantage of using 'womanist' is that, because it is from my own culture, I needn't preface it with the word 'Black' (an awkward necessity and a problem I have with the word 'feminist'), since Blackness is implicit in the term: just as for white women there is apparently no felt need to preface 'feminist' with the word 'white', since the word 'feminist' is accepted as coming out of white women's culture.*

*(1980, p.100)*

### **1.5.Morrison as a feminist writer**

In American literature and precisely in black literature, feminism and racism have become the main concern of female writers such as Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, to mention just a few. Morrison is the first African American female writer to be rewarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for her works *'The Bluest Eye'* (1970), *'Sula'* (1974), *'Song of Solomon'*(1977), and *'Beloved'*(1987). Certainly, it was also stated in the novel that she is "one of the finest contemporary writers in America today" (Ibid, p. ii). Her works revolve around themes of race and gender where she sustains the sense of Black American identity within a white society through her female characters. *The Bluest Eye*(1970), is Morrison's first novel, the

novel explores the effect of the glorification of white beauty on African American females. Morrison has presented the story of Pecola, the Black little girl who was judged and treated based on her eye color and skin pigmentation. The novel reveals the suffering of black females in the late nineteenth century. Pecola Breedlove internalizes the western measures of beauty to the extent that she becomes crazy about having a pair of blue eyes. She, as an American individual wanted to escape her own society and race believing that they were the reason of her ugliness.

Morrison depicts the effect of those standards on the black community in which she emphasizes on the female character's experiences to endure race and gender inequality; Pecola, Claudia, and Pauline are Blacks who were looked down and deceived by the mainstream culture that imposes the idea that whiteness is beauty, hence, they were fractured for not reaching those beauty measures as Morrison state in the forward of the novel that:

*Perhaps the feeling is merely indifference, mild annoyance, but it may also be hurt. It may even be that some of us know what it is like to be an actually hated — hated for thing we have no control over and cannot change. (p. ix).*

The author's focus was on the black women's conditions in relation the white ones who in a way or another influenced their lives. Shirley Temple, the symbol of beauty made Pecola crave for blue eyes to be as loved as Shirley. The author said that:

*The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults, I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. (p. 19)*

Pecola's wish to be white reflects the serious consequences of racism on females.

Morrison through her characters wants to highlight the importance the acceptance and pride of one's race. As a black feminist, she used the Narrator Claudia as the sound of the reason in the novel where she rejects the equation of whiteness is beauty.

The author, as a feminist wanted to capture their conditions from being treated as slaves, to their realization of freedom and self-confirmation. Even though Pecola could not reach this self-confirmation as she mentioned in the novel.

Pecola, then, needs to reconcile with herself, love herself where she adjusts herself to her real character, accepts her ugliness “in society’s eyes”, and find her true inner essence through peace. Pecola needs to resist real identity as a black lady, and very desire to become an ideal white lady. The state of reaching self-satisfaction, Morrison believes, is very important to provide a female with a sense of conviction that she does not need some standards to define her identity. she is just one member of the American constellation, and that she deserves being accepted among this society. Morrison attempts to break down this very disappointing image, and introduce, instead, another image inspired of human nature which is essentially miscellaneous. Again, Morrison mentioned in the forward of her novel that:

*The reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts, made me think about the necessity for the claim. Why, although reviled by others, could this beauty not be taken for granted within the community? Why did it need wide public articulation to exist? These are not clever questions ( p. xi)*

The author, through the female characters, reveals a new type of slavery that could arrest the black female which is beauty measures and standards. Therefore, in order to be welcomed among the western society they should deny and hate their real selves. Morrison as a social activist warns the African American females of the seriousness of this issue and calls them to set themselves free and revalorize themselves and their femininity. Pecola’s experience is not meant to be taken for granted, it is meant to raise the self-awareness among the females who lost their identities and self-worth as a result of the racist acts of the white society, Morrison illustrates from the novel by saying:

*All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. (p.205)*



## 1.6. Pecola as a doubly marginalized female

Literature as it reflects the issues of real life in the modern era, gives much importance to male characters more than the females. Halimi Mohammed Seghir said in his *thesis The Feminist Impulse in Beyala's Writings: An Existentialist Over Viewing* that:

*The African social reality as well as the social consciousness have pushed complains asides, and urged the African intelligentsia to think in terms of literary production. (p.2)*

Within the feminist movement, white feminists were accused for focusing on their issues, while neglecting cases of race and gender. When feminism examines tensions between male and female's pursuits in literature, it should also examine the African American female characters and their struggles inside their own community for they were doubly discriminated as they were females and blacks.

Pecola is the main character of Morrison's novel; she is a poor young girl growing up in the 1940s America. Her life was not easy at all; she, at a young age experienced all sorts of hatred and indifference. She is repeatedly called ugly by almost everyone around her. The fact of being a black girl living within a white society exposed her to be bullied and loathed by other kids in her school. The author of *the Bluest Eye* said that:

*Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike (p.45).*

She added later,

*his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud... The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and tell-tale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant "(p.87).*

When cleanliness, pureness and virtue were related to the whiteness of people; Blacks were referred to as dirty and corrupted. This discrimination led to self-hatred and that is what caused little Pecola to yearn for blue eyes. However, the black women unlike men were not only oppressed but the other races. Females and young girls were dishonoured by men of their own

race, men who were supposed to protect them, hurt them instead. Pecola, had faced several kinds of marginalisation from both her society and her father, which made her question her femininity and individuality. Morrison mentioned in the novel that: “How do you do that? I mean how do you get someone to love you?”(p.32).

Through the novel, Pecola had hard times living as a powerless black female whose only hope to change this fact, was by praying for blue eyes. The author said that:

*It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different (p.46).*

Morrison centres her work namely on race and gender in relation to beauty and wealth, thus, Pecola as a poor female who was called ugly and she herself thought she was. This conviction caused her low self-esteem and an unstable state of mind for she was doubly marginalized, double hated and doubly wounded.

Morrison’s character’s story depicts the cultural and social conceptions of beauty that deceives the African American females since they do not fit these standards. Pecola, owing to these standards drawn by white people, was subjected to racial and sexual harassment from men of her race (her father) and white men and woman, Therefore, she was craving for a white skin, and blue eyes seeking for a position in her society and among her family. Consequently, seeking affection and acceptance from her parents was her biggest concern.

Pecola’s marginalization has reached its peak when Cholly, her father, raped her. This incestuous act portrayed to most brutal kind of oppression she had gone through. Little Pecola was considered as a dirty creature and a worthless female. Putting her in the margin by both her family and friends drove her to lose her sanity at once.

*A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that didn't sprout; nobody's did...It had never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We*

*had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds into his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair. (p.5)*

Pecola is presented in the novel to portray the worst results of racial discrimination on young females, which lead her to self-loathing and self-denial. The humiliations she faced made her realize her inferior status in a society where beauty is linked to whiteness. Eventually, Pecola's attempts to be white and beautiful, caused her mental break down.

## Conclusion

It was important to examine the African American females of the early twentieth century and to capture their main issues such as gender and race inequality. Thus, the social reality of America after times of slavery was much deceiving to the Africans who were kept on the margin. Unlike men, women were doubly marginalized and were found face to racism and sexism. Consequently, black feminism emerged to meet up with their concerns and wishes to be equal to the white women. Morrison rebelled against the western white standards of beauty that underestimated the African females and lead them to refuse their real identities. The author implicitly attacked the western feminism that was only concerned with gender issues from the white female's perspective. Morrison, via the character of Pecola wanted people to be aware of the damages caused to the young girl because of some standards set by white people to suit their desires. Therefore, it became crucial for females to prove their position among the American society for the African American lady is not a slave anymore, she has to accept herself the way she is, and to liberate her "*Self*" from the "*Other*" in order to revalorize herself.

## Conclusion

*The Bluest Eye* is a depiction of the black female character's experiences and how they were brutally attacked by the female conditions which excluded them and deprived them from any sense of well-being. The beauty standards set by the American society had a strong impact of the main character's psychological state which made her question her identity and pray for another identity that fits these standards. The African American female, as a part of the minorities, suffered from racism, sexism and total rejection from the western society, and males of their race. Even though the feminist movement emerged to liberate woman from the patriarchal rule, black women were not a part of their concern. Therefore, African American writers decided to consider the black feminism movement as their weapon to revalorize the African female again.

The first chapter endeavoured to deal with the psychological analysis of the female's character in the novel. The protagonist Pecola had an unstable state of mind as a result of the series of oppressions she faced due to her skin pigmentation. The rejection Pecola found from the part her society and family at once made her also reject her real self -as being black- and pray for another self which is -being blue eyed-, to her, blue eyes will make her loved and wanted, however, she believed that the traumatic events she experienced including her father's rape to her, were the result of her blackness and therefore of her ugliness. Accordingly, Lacan's theory of "mirror stage" examines carefully the character's psyche and explains her strong will to have the pair of blue eyes.

It has been discussed in the second chapter that African minorities in America were subjected to mistreatment and injustice and consequently, they suffered from racism as well as sexism from the part of their white master and males of their race. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is a portrayal of the social deceptions that urged the Morrison to choose feminism or black feminism to illustrate the negative impacts of racial differences on the black females in general and the

young girl's psychological state in particular. Hence, seeking to give the African female the value she has lost and urge her to love and accept her difference as a strength rather than a weakness.

To conclude, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison's first novel have excelled in depicting the issues of black females in the American society. the novel conveyed the author's wish to live in a horizontal transcended society where morals and ethics matter more than in a vertical transcended society where race,gender and the social class define your identity.

## Bibliography

### Morrison Novels

Morrison, T (1987). *Beloved*, London: Vintage, Print.

Morrison, T. (1973). *Sula*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), Print.

Morrison, T. (1970). *The Bluest Eye*, London: Chatto and Windus. Print

Morrison, T. (1977). *'Song of Solomon, London: Vintage, Print.*

### Books

Abel, E. (1990). *Race, Class and Psychoanalysis? Opening Questions? Conflicts in Feminism*. California. University of California Press.

Aldridge, D. (2003). *Towards Integrating Africana Women into Africana Studies*". Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc.

Gillespie, C. (2008). *Critical companion to Toni Morrison: a literary reference to her life and work*. New York: An imprint of InfoBase Publishing.

Coontz, S. (2011). *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*. New York: Basic Books.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*, Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press. Print.

Freud, S. (1922). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Groups Psychology and Other Works*. London: The Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychology.

Friedan, B. (1963). *the feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gyles, G. W. (1984). *Crystal stair: visions of race and sex in Black women Fiction*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Harold, B. (2010). *Bloom's guides; The Bluest Eye*. New York.

J. Brooks. B. (2000). *Quiet as It's Kept Shame Trauma and Race in The Novels of Toni Morrison*. New York: State University Of New York Press.

Lacan, J. (1989). *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function*. The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. Ed. David Richter. New York: St. Martin's Press. Print.

Ludwig, V. M. (1951). *Socialism and Economic and Social Analysis*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.

- Raynor, D. J. and Butler J, E, (2007) *Morrison and the Critical Community*. The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison. Ed. Justine Tally. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Samuels, W, D.& Hudson, w. (1990). *Cleonora. Toni Morrison*. Boston: Twayne
- Walker, A.(1984). *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. Womanist Prose by Alice Walker*. San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
- Walker, A. (1985). *The Color Purple*. New York: Pocket Books,
- Wellek, R. (1978). *Theory of Literature*. London: Penguin Books

### Articles

- Carmen, M. (2011). *Feminism and Womanism*..  
<http://genderacrossborders.com/2011/03/29/feminism-and-womanism>. Retrieved 17th of Feb 2017
- Ding, Y. & Kong, X.(2010). *Tragedy of the self-splitting—A psychological reading of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*.<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11702-010-0014-9>, retrieved 02<sup>nd</sup> of Feb 2017.
- Showalter, E. (1997) "A Criticism of Our Own. *Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory*." In *Feminisms. An Anthology of literary theory and criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Ward and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers. Retrieved 23 of Feb 2017.
- Thomas, K, F. (2012). *The Quest for The Self in The Bluest Eye*.<http://EzineArticles.com/6832436>, retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> of Feb 2017.

### Theses

- Birgit, A, H. (2010). *Sexuality in Toni Morrison's Works*. Department of Culture and Literature. Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education: University of Tromsø.
- Halimi, M, S. (2014). *The Feminist Impulse in Beyala's Writings: An Existentialist Over Viewing*. Doctorate thesis: University of Batna. Retrieved the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2017 from [http://theses.univbatna.dz/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=4404&Itemid=4](http://theses.univbatna.dz/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=4404&Itemid=4)



Hooks, B. (1992). *Feminism – it's a black thang!* *Essence* 23. V 3. Retrieved the 20<sup>th</sup> of march, 2017 from <https://aboutabicycle.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/bell-hooks-black-looks-race-and-representation.pdf>

Vijay. D, S (oct2016). *Pseudo identity in Toni Morrison's the bluest eye and. Sula*.vol3. Issue10 retrieved the 15<sup>th</sup>of march2017 from the [https://www.academia.edu/30414897/Pseudo\\_Identity\\_In\\_Toni\\_Morrisons\\_The\\_Bluest\\_Eye\\_And\\_Sula](https://www.academia.edu/30414897/Pseudo_Identity_In_Toni_Morrisons_The_Bluest_Eye_And_Sula)

## Abstract

*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison represents the life of the African American females in the early twentieth century, who were deeply influenced by the beauty standards at that time. Living in a society of prejudice and injustice, women had suffered from racism and sexism. The black females used to be treated on the basis of their eye colors and skin pigmentation, rather than their deeds and intentions. Morrison's novel explores the racism exerted on the blacks, and shows the impact of the racist notion of beauty in relation to whiteness on identity construction and self-hatred. The story of Pecola portrays the worst effect of racism and double marginalization. Her ugliness was, unfortunately, the reason beyond her mistreatment by the world surrounding her. Her state of being rejected drug her into a blind alley in which she both got lost; she became more pessimistic to the point whereby she started developing a sort of hate to real identity which is, in her eyes, different from the one she aspires to possess (expected identity). This transformation at the level of her perception of her identity/ self is but the resultant of an abnormal perception of the woman. Beauty which is not, normally, based on physical appearance, has become the criterion of acceptance. Pecola, sees in blue-eyed girl a model of worth of trust and acceptance among and by the others. Morrison wants to put an accent on the necessity of self-satisfaction; for her, if women accepted themselves as they were, they would have imposed their ideas and themselves, and revalorized themselves, first originally Africans and as free African American women.

**Key terms:** beauty standards, racism, double marginalization, identity, real self, ideal self.

## Résumé

Le roman de Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* représente la vie des femmes afro-américaines au début du XXe siècle, énormément influencées par les normes de beauté de cette époque. Etant sujets aux préjugés et à l'injustice d'une société dite moderne, les femmes essayaient de se libérer de leur captivité psychologique embourbée de la ségrégation raciale et sexuelle. Les femmes de couleur ont toujours été traitées sur la base de leur couleur de peau et des yeux, plutôt que sur la base ou en fonction de leurs actes et intentions. Ce roman explore le racisme auquel les noirs étaient sujets, comme il conflit autour du critère de beauté attribué à la couleur de la peau. Un critère qui semble un déterminant irrationnel quant à la définition et la construction identitaire et par rapport à la haine de soi. L'histoire de Pecola dépeint l'effet émotionnel du racisme et les répercussions de la double marginalisation. La fillette a été mal traitée par tout le monde autour d'elle à cause de sa laideur. Le rejet, au qu'elle avait fait face, lui faisait détester sa véritable identité ou moi et désirait une autre identité qualifiant son soi idéal ; Une belle fille aux yeux bleus qui serait plus aimable est acceptée parmi les autres. Morrison veut mettre l'accent sur la nécessité de l'autosatisfaction, car si les femmes s'acceptent-elles telles quelles sont, elles s'imposeront, inéluctablement, à la société dont la nature mosaïque, et se revaloriseront, e revanche, en tant que femmes d'origines Africaines et, éventuellement, en tant que femmes Africaines-américaines libres.

**Les mots clés :** les normes de beauté, le racisme, la double marginalisation, l'identité, le véritable moi, un soi idéal.

## المخلص

تمثل العين الزرقاء لتوني موريسون حياة النسوة الافرو-اميريكية في مطلع القرن العشرين، حيث تأثرن بمعايير الجمال آن ذاك. فالعيش في مجتمع مبني على التحيز و الظلم جعلهن يعانين من العنصرية و التمييز الجنسي. لقد اعتادت النساء السمرات على معاملتهن وفقا للون أعينهن و وبشرتهن بدل النظر الى أفعالهن و نواياهن. تتحرى رواية موريسون العنصرية الممارسة على السود كما تبين آثار الفكر العنصري حول علاقة الجمال ببياض البشرة على بناء الهوية و كره الذات. تجسد حكاية بيكولا أسوأ أنواع العنصرية و التهميش المزدوج. فلأسف، كانت بشاعة بيكولا السبب وراء سوء معاملة الجميع لها. فالعيش بصفة منبوذة أدى بها الى سبيل مظلم حيث كانت ضائعة؛ أصبحت متشائمة لدرجة تطوير نوع من الكره اتجاه ذاتها الحقيقية التي كانت بالنسبة لها مختلفة عن التي تطمح لاكتسابها(الذات المتوقعة). لم يكن التحول على مستوى ذاتها سوى تصور شاذ عن المرأة. فالجمال الذي لا يجب عادة أن يتمحور على المظهر الخارجية، قد أصبح معيارا للقبول. ترى بيكولا في الفتاة ذات العين زرقاء مثالا جديرا بالثقة و القبول بين الآخرين. شددت موريسون على ضرورة الرضا بالذات حيث بالنسبة لها ،إذا تقبل النساء أنفسهن كما هن، سيفرضن أنفسهن و أفكارهن، كما سيؤمن أنفسهن أولا كإفارقة أصليين و كنسوة افرو-أمريكيين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معايير الجمال، العنصرية، التهميش المزدوج، الهوية، الذات الحقيقية، الذات المثالية.