CHAPTER 3
3. A DETAILED STUDY OF THE ISSUE OF GENDER IDENTITY WITH THE RELEGATED NORMS OF RACE

Subjected to serve brutality of racism, classicism and sexism by the white patriarchal society, the black woman was tormented in all respects, beyond description. Brought to the American continent as slaves in the seventeenth century. They had fought for their economic survival and against social discrimination. As a result of catering to the ever-increasing needs of capitalist machinery and because of accepting one’s own complicity in an unjust system, the black woman is forced to adopt three diversified ways of life. She chose to lead either as a carefree life of a wanton or boldly to face, to cope up with its hardships or to accept suffering as an inevitable outcome of her existence. Greda Lerner in her famous work Black Women in White America had much light to throw upon the awful predicament:

ever since slavery, they [black women] have been exploited, by white men through rape or enforced sexual services. These sexual mores, which are characteristic of the relationship of colonizer to the women of the conquered group, function not only symbolically but actually to fasten the bridge of inferiority into enslaved group. The black woman was degraded by the sexual attack and more profoundly by being deprived of a strong black man on whom she could rely for protection.¹
Such characters are seen emerging in Ann Petry’s The Street, Alice Walker’s Meridian, Gloria Naylor’s The Women of Brewster place, The Third Life of the Grange Copelan and The Black party.

Various writers in and outside America are representing the tragic alienation of the black in the white society. By trying to attain unattainable white standards of life and behavior, the blacks suffer and are eventually crippled of racism and its malaise create the setting for tragedy in The Street by Ann Petry. Here the picture of Lutie Johnson a beautiful and light skinned, single mother with a small son emerges. She has to go out, into the harsh world to earn her livelihood and leaves the boy alone and vulnerably to the sordid demands of the ghetto.

Despite the past that Lutie is a decent woman, her neighbours see her as a whore. In their minds a single woman could represent nothing pure or decent and her withdrawal, loneliness subscribes to the popular belief and works against her. In the beginning part of the novel her husband leaves her for another woman because he cannot understand, or sympathize with her simple-minded quest for wealth and a comfortable life. She is left all alone with a small child, to raise herself from the desperate state.

Being left alone with a small child in a big city Lutie tries to raise herself from her desperate state, unable to do so; she tries to get established in the singing world. Here we get the stereotype of the black singing woman. We find that Lutie is frustrated in her attempt when she finds that talent alone is not enough and her saleable commodity is her sex. Survival would depend upon utilizing this commodity without any possible prick of mind. Lutie refuses to do so inspite of her
miserable existence. Her insistence upon maintaining her moral standards leads her to murder her future employee when he tries to rape her. In the whole novel this is her only sign of rebellion and we see Lutie putting all her strength into this act of pent-up frustration. ²

Alice Walker’s Meridian is a novel, which tells of the pilgrimage in search of genuine values and how her search for wholeness is complete when she is able to redefine her role, which has been handed down to black women through tradition and society. We see here the search for self-knowledge and wholeness that leads to transcendence as Meridian finally discovers her-self and her relation to the world at large.

The first part of Meridian is focused on Meridian’s initiation into adulthood and her preparation for the journey. The second part describes Meridian’s active participation in the Civil Rights movement and her renunciation of her child and the third part “Ending” concentrates on her atonement and release.

In this novel Walker briefly mentions Meridian’s experience with the revolutionary group in New York and they pressed her answer to the question “Will you kill for the revolution”? At this time she recalls her past experience. She remembered the days when she lost her motherland, how she was lonely without it. Her sense of isolation and freedom deepened and she began her search for freedom at the age of thirteen, knowing that she was not whole. She replied like a true revolutionary that she should reject violence as the approach to change. She prefers non-violence because she is ‘held by something in the past; with the memory of the
old man in the south [...] and the sight of the young girls singing in the country ever'.

In the novel we see that:

she had left North and come to
South[.]remaining close to the people – to see
them, to be with them, to understand them and
herself. (31)

This foreshadows Meridian’s pilgrimage in search of genuine values. Although marriage and motherhood are negative experiences for Meridian, she attempts to transform herself. She realizes that in order to retain her wholeness she must rise above her bodily claims. Her abortion and sterilization symbolize her anger and frustration towards pregnancy and motherhood. It is also a metaphor for rooting out sexual weakness because Meridian wants to meet Truman at an equal level. 3

In The Women of Brewster Place we see a racist, sexist society in which black women struggle to live with their dreams. They are strong independent-minded and nurture each other. They are proud of their African roots and heritage and ready to face hardships for the betterment of the black people. The concluding part of the novel conveys to us Mattie’s dauntless spirit, which reaffirms her faith in her own-self. She shakes off her despair and determines to live with gusto. In the novel we see that the heroines exchange their experiences, feelings and thoughts. This affirms the fact that the black women survive together although alienated from the mainstream of the racist, sexist society.
In The Black Party, we see the women residents struggling to gain better housing facilities from the white landlord. It innovates a new awareness among the women and the spiritual strength in the bonding. All the women came and they participated in the function of the community. Collectively these women want to bring a vast change in their lives and thus the novel depicts the search of black womanhood, its strength and weaknesses.

Once again we could see the most sensitive portrayal of self-hatred that black women often experience through the story of Pecola, in Morrison's The Bluest Eye. Pecola is tormented, criticized and laughed at by the schoolmaster, her neighbour and even by her mother, and she prays passionately for a blue pair of eyes. Raped, deprived of love and reminded constantly of her own ugliness, she becomes insane and we see her as a complete victim of whatever is around her. But before her culminating into madness she did fight for her survival. She did every possible effort to be ‘accepted’ in the society. Her escape into madness did unravel the deformities on the part of the society.  

In the different novels mentioned we see that the modus operandi of the struggle of feminism is different. In many cases we get the archetype of a bold emergent woman with a dauntless spirit who feels that the stigma of racism should be fought back with equal dynamism, as the blacks are not responsible for the shame. The women characters shake off their despair and they determine to live with gusto. We see women as tough and enduring, as they are survivors as well as victims. Some exhibit stoic resignation to the fate while most others come out with militant action and they go in for implementation for their liberated thoughts.
protesting against the atrocities shown towards them and thereby pining for selfhood and recognition.

We also have real life examples before us of black women who played a major role in shaping ground for freedom, development and identity of Africans. During an era when de facto segregation in the North and Jim Crow laws in the South kept aloof many African Americans to recognize their full potential as citizens of the United States, a remarkable woman, Mary McLeod Bethune spearheaded changes that helped to bolster the African American community against institutionalized racism. Her numerous achievements include: founding the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute in 1904, which became Bethune Cookman College in 1923; working as the Director of the Negro Affairs for National Youth Administration (NYA) for the Roosevelt administration during the 1930’s; and founding the National Council of Negro Women the quality of life for African American could be improved on social, economic, and political levels thus.

Bethune envisaged a better world for African-Americans, one in which blacks would rightfully garner respect from White American and international communities while simultaneously engendering respect for themselves. This was an important concept for Bethune who fought against widespread negative stereotypes of African American traditions and culture propagated by films such as “The Birth of a Nation” (1915), largely based on the anti-black writings of Thomas Dixon, Popular culture as well as some so-called historical writings imaged African Americans as indocile, incapable of self-governance, and best suited for menial jobs that would keep them in a subservient position relative to whites. 

5
Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) and its accompanying publication, The Journal of Negro History between 1915 and 1916 to de legitimize negative historical stereotypes regarding African Americans. He organized the ASNLH council to address administrative and funding concerns for the organization and appointed Bethune to serve in 1930. She retained this position until 1933, thus helping to ensure that the ANSLH would continue its mission to recognize African Americans as historical actors who had participated fully in shaping of American society. Bethune served as president of the ASNLH from 1936-1951 during which time she encouraged Woodson to publish the Negro History Bulletin, a journal designed to make black history accessible to the community at large.

Bethune focused her energies upon creating employment and educational opportunities for blacks particularly after the stock market crash of 1929. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced his New Deal programme, he also formed a committee to deal directly with black economic issues especially those of the rural south.

Roosevelt recognized Bethune as the exceptional educator who had inaugurated Bethune-Cookman College in 1923, and appointed her Director of the Negro Division of the N Y A in 1935. According to John Hope Franklin, Bethune became a member of the “black brain trust” of academicians, attorneys and other highly trained professionals who were assigned specific projects under the New Deal.
Bethune's principal responsibility was to provide jobs for youths between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, a few of whom were graduate students. Bethune helped to put more than 64,000 black youths to work in both work-study and out-of-school programmes designed to assist the reforestation and soil conservation efforts so popular during the World War II era. Until the close of the NYA division in 1944, Bethune also provided more than $600,000 in funding for black students enrolled in college and graduate school programmes.

The council, later dubbed the "Black Cabinet" was limited in its powers by what one historian describes as Roosevelt’s inherent "pragmatism" in refusing to completely eliminate de jure segregation. Bethune, however, remained an optimist. She was able to skillfully balance the concerns of Americans while simultaneously opening doors for women across racial lines. This was because, unlike many of her colleagues within the Black Cabinet, Bethune had achieved access to the Executive Office through developing a confidante in the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, and through her activities in the women's club movement.

I am interested in women and believe in their possibilities.... We need a vision for larger things.... We need a united organization to open doors for women so that when it speaks, its power will be felt.

In the classic stories by and about Black women Mary Helen Washington says:
When I Think of how alone black women have been alone because our bodies, over which we have had so little control; alone because the damage done to our men has prevented their closeness and protection; and alone because we have had no one to tell us stories about ourselves. I realize that black writers are an important and comforting presence in my life. Only they know my story. It is absolutely necessary that they be permitted to discover and interpret the entire range and spectrum of the experience of black women and not to be stymied by preconceived conclusions. Because of these writers, there are more models of how it is possible for us to live. There are more choices for black women to make, and there is a larger space in the universe for us. 

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar said in The Madwomen in the Attic—

[...] just as the male artist’s struggle against the precursor takes the form of what (Harold) Bloom calls revisionary swerves, flights, misreading, so the female writer’s battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process. Her battle however, is not against her (male) precursor’s reading of the world but against her reading of her. (26)
Therefore we could see that though women from the beginning have been an oppressed class; they have come out of their closet with all their potentials and energy to search for their true-identity. Many others like Bethune have fought for their rights and given way to women’s visions and capabilities.

As Morrison rightly stated:

We black women have obviously underestimated our strength. I used to think Why Don’t they just run ahead of us? But obviously we are moving pretty fast. The main thing we have to deal with is, what makes a woman? Once we decide that everything else will fall into plan. As perhaps everything has.

Black men have to decide what makes a man. ¹³

Morrison’s first novel The Bluest Eye deals with the same theme of oppression based on race, class and gender. It is a story of a girl child who acts in every possible way to become fair and beautiful with blue-eyes, to be accepted by the world. The Bluest Eye illustrates her struggle, her efforts to make her place in the society.
Black women have been the most exploited class in the white society. The era of colonialization, which enforced slavery on Africans made the position of women awesome. Neither the white nor their own community came for their rescue. See Abraham, Elizabeth. *American Literature Today: The Dialectic of Feminism in Afro-American Novels*, Ed. Suman Bala, Prestige Books: New Delhi, 22.

2 Ann Petry came up with a theme where women had to survive without any male support. There are certain rules in the society, through which society perceives Lutie as a whore because she was single. In their view a single woman could represent nothing pure or decent. But her morality is highlighted to such an extent that she kills her future employee when he tries to rape her. To add further insight to our understanding, see Abraham, Elizabeth. *American Literature Today: The Dialectic of Feminism in Afro-American Novels*, Ed. Suman Bala, Prestige Books: New Delhi, 22-23.

3 This novel very beautifully illustrates Meridon’s search for wholeness and her efforts to redefine her image. Her entire life-cycle gets complete through the struggle and ultimate release. She chooses a path of revolution but leaves the tool of violence to fulfill her desires. It was because she did remember the true beauty of peaceful history. For strong points of view on different aspects of this issue, see Abraham, Elizabeth. *American Literature Today: The Dialectic of Feminism in Afro-American Novels*, Ed. Suman Bala, Prestige Books: New Delhi, 22-24.

4 The subject of Black woman’s Physical Beauty occurs with such frequency in the writings of black women that it indicates they have been deeply affected by the discrimination against the shade of their skin and texture of their hair. In almost every novel or autobiography written by black women, there is at least one incident in which the dark skinned girl wishes to be either white or light skinned with good hair. For rich evocational details on this aspect, see Morrison, Toni. Rev. of *The Bluest Eye*, by Hanskel Franel. The New York Times Books Review, November, 1970.3.

5 Being a woman of vision, Bethune traced the elements of negative image of Afro-Americans and took concrete steps to change the social, political and economic condition of Afro-Americans. It was not the first time when the film like ‘The Birth of a Nation’ was produced which propagated the negative image of Afro-Americans, centuries back we can trace this negative image in the works of European philosophers. Bethune deserves applause for putting efforts to change it. For more information on this, see Pertiller, Tammy Lynn. “Mary McLeod Bethune: Visionary Activist”. *BrownQuarterly, v.1, no.1, Aug 1996*. <http://browneyboard.org/brownqurt/01-1/01-1b.htm>.

6 Bethune unraveled the works of such Afro-American historical actors who contributed in shaping American heritage. Her works very clearly presented historical facts that were the eye-opener to the world. For an elaborate view regarding this aspect, see Meier, August and Eliot Rudwick. *Black History and the Historical Profession 1915-1980*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana. 1986, 60-61.

7 It has been a historical fact that many developments and revolutions took place after the advent of the ‘Bulletin’. The circulation of journals fuelled the development of the Novel and many revolutions. Books are accessible to a fixed amount of population whereas journals have a wider accessibility. Therefore it was a major and most required step taken by Bethune. For details, see Gardner, J. Betty. “Association for the study of Afro-American Life and History”. Eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. *Black Women in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*, vol.2A-L. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. 1993, 46-48.

8 Bethune’s potentials and visionary attitude was soon recognized after she focused herself to eradicate unemployment and educational opportunities. For more examples, see Franklin, John Hope and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 6th ed. Alfred A. Knopf Inc: New York. 1988, 349.
Bethune recognized the need to make the foundation of Afro-Americans strong by realizing the need to educate the future generation so that they can help channalize the future of Afro-Americans. See Franklin, John Hope and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. 'From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans'. 6th ed, 349.


3.1 PECOLA AND HER QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN TERMS OF A POSITIVE BLACK WOMAN IMAGE (THE BLUEST EYE 1970)

It had occurred to Pecola sometimes ago that if her eyes that held the pictures and knew the sights if those eyes of hers were different that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different and Mrs. Breedlove, too, may be they’d say-why look at pretty eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.

(34)

This is an ironical statement that clearly exposes the deformity on the part of the society, which defines prejudiced parameters as symbols of beauty.

Pretty eyes, Pretty eyes, Pretty blue eyes, Big
Blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run Jip runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes, Four blue eyes, Four pretty blue eyes; Blue Jay eyes, blue like Mrs Forrest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning glory, blue eyes Alice and Jerry blue storybook eyes. Each night without fail she prayed for blue eyes. 1
Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* represents a simple theme; the story of a black girl who wants blue eyes as a symbol of beauty; which could bring all the goodness and happiness that her life lacked. The blue eyes, blond hair, fair skin, are the symbols of beauty valued in the West, as proclaimed by romantic novels, movies, billboard dolls and the reaction of people to golden objects. The desire of a black girl for blue eyes is a real and symbolic statement about the conflict between the good and the beautiful and two cultures and how it effects the psyche of the people within those cultures. The theme is at the base a conflict of societal values of Anglo-American and Afro-American cultures, complicated by the socio-political dominance of one culture over another. This novel therefore represents Pecola's search for identity and acceptance entangled between her black roots and white America.

This novel symbolically deals with every aspect whether mythical, political, cultural, racial or sexual. By dealing with Pecola's search for identity Morrison, encompasses three hundred years of unsuccessful interface between black and white cultures. The Bluest Eyes begins with prose familiar to a few generations of Americans black and white:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty, Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green and white house. They are very happy (1).

These are the words familiar to every American from their childhood. They are brought up with an ideal picture of an American family. But Morrison by removing the punctuations from these fragments heightens the lack of internal integrity.2
Morrison gives us an ideal picture of a happy family, it is a story about Pecola Breedlove, her mother and father, about Claudia and Frieda McTeer and their mother and father, about Junior and his mother, Geraldine and his father; about Maureen Peal and her mother, father; about Mr. Henry; about the whores; about Soaphead Church; and of course about the white family for whom Mrs. Breedlove works.

Claudia is the narrator of this novel, in her introductory statement and in the section that begins each chapter, she establishes the time, place, image and structure of the novel and also introduces the major characters of the book. Claudia tells us in her introduction that this story takes place in the year 1940-41 in the fall, not in January when the year begins in spring but in the fall when the school starts according to the rhythm of a child's life. In autumn begins Pecola's story, conveying not to be the usual mythic one of birth, death and re-birth. Her narration proceeds from pathos to tragedy and finally to madness, as the earth will not accept her seeds. ³

Claudia being the child narrator of Pecola's tragedy symbolically tells her own story. She also experiences the gravest effects of the myth of beauty as Pecola dies. She is not seen as ugliest of ugly, but she knows that all admire blue eyes and blond hair and that she does not possess them. The dolls she receives at Christmas, the Shirley Temple mug, and so on, are measures of her own lack of desirability, Pecola does not have the necessary distance, time and space to know what is happening to her therefore Claudia becomes a way of giving voice to the graveness
of Pecola’s situation even as she is confronted with the same problems, as though less intensely.

The main body of The Bluest Eye is divided into four chapters; Claudia introduces us with the statement in which she compares the failure of the marigolds to sprout with the death of Pecola’s baby. Nature’s images are constant throughout the book and help it to organize its structure. At the center of this, Nature constructs the physical and psychological events that lead to the rape of Pecola and to her ill-fated pregnancy. The divisions into seasons beginning with autumn chart the development of events. These events form the plot of this novel.

But the seasons are not only surface movements in the novel, they are ironic and brutal comments of Pecola’s descent into madness. In spring, love flows into each other and fertility rites are regenerated, as nature comes back to life; yet it is the season when Pecola is raped by her father, the only love she is to know. Her rape in the spring is proceeded by a ‘false spring’ in the winter, personified by Maureen Peal, the green eyed, blond black, who befriends with her talk of babies and daddies and follows that wooing with the rejection: - I ‘am cute’ And you Ugly! Black and Ugly Black Emos.”(56) The image of the season erupts every way in this book, as nature itself remains constant, but steadily aloof. 4

The Dick and Jane Primer reminds us of the pervasiveness of the happy family, the middle American, semantic beauty myth according to which young children are led to behave by enforcing that others are happy because they are white and perhaps because they are pretty, are not too noisy, or are leading an orderly life. The more confusing, different poverty-ridden or depressed a child’s
life is, the more that child will yearn for the norms the dominant society, provides in terms of beauty and happiness. Geraldine’s house with its orderliness and cleanliness seems very beautiful and when Pecola sees it she thinks it is beautiful, full of happiness and love.

The existence of Breedloves was an empty bowl in poverty. Emptiness and ugliness were the ones contributed in their non-existence. It was ‘tradition’ which was responsible for their label of ‘ugliness’, which both the communities accepted without a second thought, considering it to be true:

You look at them and wonder why they were so ugly you looked closely and could not find a source. Then you realize that it came from conviction, their conviction, it was as though some serious all knowing masters had given each one a cloack of ugliness to wear and they had each accepted it without question. (28)

Every member of Pecola’s family dealt with it in their own way. They had nothing to offer except for the humiliation and outrage with which they could fill the emptiness of other people. Every one required deadly elements to sustain themselves in their emptiness. Pecola’s journey of awareness starts in this hollow atmosphere, which offers her an unanswered search to find her true self so that she could be accepted in the white society.

Alternates to this pattern of victimization could be found in the characters of the whores. They give perceptions to the unawareness of Pecola. Though different
in both ways and ambitions, both groups offer ways of coping with the pain of accident. They are women who do their work without illusion, self-hatred or guilt. They have no feelings for their customers or for those dishonest women who pretend virtue but are in fact unfaithful. They respect only the innocent like Pecola, who they see as having the same honesty and integrity as themselves. They are the primary folk figures in the novel. Even their names—Poland, China, Maginot Line—suggest larger than life characters.⁵

Maginot Line entertains Pecola with outstanding stories of past love and adventure. She keeps alive the idea of love in her recollection of Dewey Prince, the only man she did not sell herself to. Pecola used to ask them questions about their work, their income, their dreams etc. Pecola asked:

> You rich, Miss Marie? Puddin, I got money’s many”. Where you get it from? You don’t do no work […] How come you always say “Who a Jesus and a number. (40)

Pecola had so many questions to ask about their lives and she started knowing the facts of human life through their answers. Pecola asked “you and Dewey prince have any children Miss Marie?” (43) Pecola then looking from the windows thinks of Dewey Prince and the way he must have loved Miss Marie. All these characters while giving answers to her queries created a world of her own imagination in which she imagined their lives in her own way.

When winter approached a new girl named Maureen Peal enters in the school. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch-
ropes that hung down her back. In the same school Pecola was being harassed by a
group of boys “Black e mo, Black e mo Yadaddsllepnsakked. Black emo [...]”
(50).

It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its
teeth. They seemed to learn self-hatred, their elaborately designed hope lessens and
sucked it all up into a fiery corn of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of
their minds cooled-and spelled over lips of outrage consuming whatever was in its
path. “They danced a macabre ballet around the victim whom, for their own sake,
they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit” (50).

Here Morrison symbolically represents the ease and comfort given by the
black characters to the white ones. The restraint traditions that they possessed were
worse than the liberty of China, Poland and Ms Marie. At the same time others
once again to comfort their envy, kill them, as the black cat lies dead with its blue
eyes closed, leaving only an empty, black and helpless face.

The families of Breedlove and McTeers give a sharp contrast in terms of the
principles, desires and values they cherish. Families like the ironically named
Breedloves survive at the very fringe of society, where the “hem” begins to unravel
their bonds that attach family members to one another and form the basis for
community. Basically existing as a social unit, they function even less as an
emotional unit, for they lack even the “power of the weak’ that characterize
oppressed groups. 6

Pauline Breedlove, disillusioned by her family life, retreats into a dream
world purveyed by cinematic image, made up of white cultural fantasies. Seduced
by appearances, Pauline damns her only daughter at birth. During labour she overhears white doctors commenting on the ease of childbirth for black women. “They deliver right away and with no pain just like horses” (97). Pauline projects onto her undeserving newborn daughter her outrage at such facile and prejudicial judgments. Pecola’s story starts as soon as she was born to be the part of the cruel destiny. Where every definition conforming her personality is pre-defined, even her birth. 7 While Pecola was being born every emotional aspect was ready for her, what was awaited was just her flushed arrival. And here she arrives with a “head full of pretty hair but Lord she was ugly” (98). The emotional crippling shared by Cholly and Pauline indeed bred into the next generation.

McTeer family serves as a counterpoint for the Breedloves, Pauline slaps Pecola and protects a little white girl, whereas Mrs. McTeer takes in the black girl, even though it is a strain on her family resources. Cholly rapes his own daughter whereas McTeer nearly kills a boarder who fondles his daughter. The Breedloves are absorbed in variations of self-hatred despite all the economic, psychological and social forces opposing them.

The McTears live without illusion as much as possible. The parents whip their children, complain about the burdens of life, and struggle only semi-successfully to acquire the necessities for survival. The children must face embarrassment because of their cheap clothing and lack of money and must deal with the same assaults on their race as Pecola. But unlike the Breedloves and light skinned Geraldine and Maureen, they do not measure their human worth by the
symbols of the dominant white culture. Although the Shirley Temple cup belongs
to the McTeers and although Frieda, Claudia’s sister loves the child actress’s
movies, no one in the family defines himself or herself by the lack of whiteness.
They accept their difference from whites as a commodity given to their existence,
not as a deprivation to be evaded or mourned. ⁸

Given such an environment Pecola’s journey of rejection starts when
Geraldine so harshly throws her out and when her own mother expels her from the
spotless kitchen belonging to rich white family that Mrs. Breedlove works for.
“Pecola’s skin grows like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white wood
work, polished cabinet and brilliant cup ware” (83) in the kitchen. When Geraldine
stares at Pecola unblinking and un-bashed with “[…] great uncomprehending eyes.
Eyes that questioned nothing, but asked everything” (83). Pecola thinks “the end of
the world lay in their eyes and she thinks that the beginning and all the waste in
between” (83-84). Again she realizes the unworthiness of her existence; and
when Pecola turns to find the front door she saw “Jesus looking down at her with
sad and unsurprised eyes” (72).

In response to this psychological violence Pecola takes up the quest for blue
eyes. Initially, she limits herself to drinking white milk from a cup with a Shirley
Temple decal and to buying and eating Mary Jane candies, through this popular
culture Eucharist, she hopes to be substantiated from common black clay into
spiritual whiteness. At this stage she achieves only the momentary happiness of
seeing the white faces wishing to have one herself. ⁹
Claudia the narrator of the novel symbolically confronts the readers with the search of every member of the family. Pecola now eleven starts being confronted with the facts of life sometimes by the whores, Claudia, Frieda or by the society itself, Claudia says:

Outdoors we know was the real terror of life […] there is a difference being put out and being outdoors. If you are put out you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors there is no place to go. (11)

Every aspect of the world be it the community, the society, or her own family could not give Pecola a healthy atmosphere for her balanced and happy growth. When Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove fought she prayed: “Please God” (33), she whispered into the palm of her hand “Please make me disappear” (33). She wanted to disappear to be free, to be alive in a world of happiness but “as long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people” (34) only. Her quest for her ugliness made her watch herself in the mirror and discover the secret of her ugliness: “the ugliness that made her ignored and despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike” (50). The binding conviction that was thrown on her as being black and therefore ugly makes her search for her acceptable identity, she made every possible effort to have beautiful blue eyes, as to her they could be the ones with which she could have an acceptable image.

This time again it was not Pecola who was humiliated but the entire community even if it presents a contrast to Breedloves, Claudia and Frieda were a part of it, as they were so jealous of Maureen Peal and the attention she had in the
school. They asked, “What did we lack [...]? The thing to fear was the thing that made her beautiful and not us” (57-58).

As the novel advances so also the growth of Pecola. Her every possible move is towards getting the required ‘beauty,’ those blue eyes. Every object that pacifies even the slightest part of it becomes a piece of admiration for Pecola. Junior also humiliates Pecola by calling her to his house, when she was walking through the playground; he call her to his house to show her those kittens and inside throws a black cat on Pecola right at her face, at first she screams and cries but soon her pain changes into softness when she feels the fur of the cat at her ankles Pecola is mesmerized by the ice blue eyes on the black face of the cat; the eyes she yearned for and they looked charmingly beautiful “The blue eyes on the black face held her”. (70)

As the spring approached the full cycle of natural birth changed in style but not in content. To and fro death makes its presence felt. The questions in the growing minds are some times about death as well. As when Claudia lying in the grass thinks:

I split the stems of milkweed and thought about
ants and peach pits and death and where the
world went when I closed my eyes. (75)

Ones again Pecola is exploited. This time by her father as drunk one day, he watches his daughter washing dishes, and feels his love for her. Thinking that he had given nothing to his daughter, repeats the same pitiful gesture that drew him to her mother. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, and pity than love.
His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence. Cholly’s mind was full of definite questions as “why did she have to look so whipped?” (127) She was a child -unburdened-why was she not happy? His mind now struggling to find the answers and remedies feels – “what could he do for her ever? What to give her? What say to her?” (127). What could a burned out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven years old daughter? And what he could just give her was love, leaving her in pain and disgust, unconscious she lay on the floor.

Pecola was pregnant now carrying a baby of her own father. She must now find her way through this vortex of opposite striving and it is to a spiritual source, Soaphead church, that she goes for reconciliation, for salvation, for ‘re-birth’.

Soaphead loves little girls whose bodies seem to him the least offensive of all human beings. His philosopher’s attraction for little girls is rooted in his intense dislike for human beings in general, who in their physical and cultural forms are imperfect, in a continual state of decay. His distorted view of life flows from the same cause that transforms Mrs. Breedlove into a cruel martyr of a mother, the same cause that impress upon Cholly Breedlove his own unworthiness, his own ugliness, again the same cause that would inspire Pecola Breedlove to ask this so called and so thought “clean old man” to give her blue eyes. He thought it was at once:

the most fantastic and most logical
petition he had ever received. Here was
an ugly little girl asking for beauty.(138)
Manipulating Pecola’s faith in miracles and pressing her to commit a debased act on his behalf by poisoning his land lady’s aged dog, he violates her spiritual innocence as surely as her father abused her physical innocence. By the age that most girls reach ‘sexual’ maturity Pecola is already a lost soul, imprisoned in madness from which she can never flee.

It was we who made her realize the facts of her self - the facts which were made by us, nurtured and made eternal by us; the facts that did not let us accept them (blacks), the facts that categorized blacks, the facts that initiated her quest for those beautiful blue eyes; which she thought would make “us” accept her. She thinks that when she will get those eyes they will say, “why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.” (34)

But once again we see an effort of someone who understands; someone who could first not do any miracles but can only, make believe others in ‘what ought to be’ instead of ‘what actually is’. Therefore Mr. Soaphead rightly tells God:

I, I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes, I gave her the blue, blue two blue eyes cobalt blue[...] No one else will see her blue eyes. But she will. And she will live happily ever after. (144)

Now believing in her possessed quest that she has the blue pair of eyes:

She [...] Stepped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end [...]. And now I see her
searching the garbage for what? Thing we
assassinated. (163)

It is her life we assassinated and which Pecola searches for; Morrison very
clearly shows that it is the society, which is responsible for the culmination of
Pecola into madness. But the entire beauty of the novel lies in Pecola’s efforts, her
struggle to elevate her position. She did emerge as a winner because she ultimately
made us realize – how beautiful she was with all the divinity she had, and how
ugly we are being the factor behind her wreckage.

Another most prominent and basic aspect of female relationship is, of
maternal-bonds. Educated black women are constantly in search for their status in
the society. Now they want to live life their own way, which in turn makes them
move away from their maternal relationship. Afro-Americans in their struggle to be
‘in’ as a part of the society have moved away from their own black culture,
considering it to be inferior in comparison to the white culture.
1 How to be accepted? Were the key words for which the answer lies in only a blue pair of eyes for Pecola. She understood that only a blue pair of eyes could solve this problem. Even just by looking at her would make other people guilty of a wrongdoing. See Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. Alfred A. Knopf Books. NY: USA. 1970, 34-35.

2 Morrison ironically begins with the background, by the prose, which is the first lesson of reading. The stereotypes represented through the description of a house comment on the inaccuracy and insufficiency of the whites.

Morrison has explained, “The Dick and Jane story is a frame acknowledging the outer civilization. The primer with white children was the way life was presented to the black people. As the novel proceeded I wanted that primer version broken up and confused, which explains the typographical running together of the words”. (The Language must not Sweat. p.29). For an analysis of the relationship between these primer sections and the characters, see Klotman, Phyllis R. "Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple sensibility in the Bluest Eye". *Black American Literature Forum*. Winter 1979.123-25.


8 This is the power of McTeers, which makes them complete in every way. They represent a section, which doesn’t let itself down by the persuasive power of white norms. The best part about them is, they don’t have any kind of inferiority complex. For details, see Byerman, E. Keith. “Beyond Realism”. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 104.

9 Victimized by the society Pecola doesn’t recede abruptly into madness; first she tries to fill the part that deprived her of an accepted position in the society. Therefore what ‘I’ saw was an effort in her struggle for survival. She tried to have the beauty through every