

Literature PBAT

The Bluest Eye

Assessment: OUTSTANDING/GOOD

PBAT: *The Bluest Eye*

Read the choices below and make your selection:

1. Self-hatred and Internalized Racism in *The Bluest Eye*

Questions for your consideration:

What is self-hatred? What is its source?

What is internalized racism? How does internalized racism differ from self-hatred?

Who suffers from these in *The Bluest Eye*?

How do the characters deal with these (self-hatred and internalized racism)?

What is the author's intent / purpose in defining characters that suffer from self-hatred and internalized racism? (Does the author implicitly or explicitly recommend ways to deal with these?)

1. Literary Allusion in *The Bluest Eye*

Questions for your consideration:

What is a Literary Allusion? What purpose do they serve in the novel?

What literary allusions exist in the text?

Why are the allusions there – how do they inform the theme, argument or main idea of the novel?

1. The construct of America's cultural ideal

Questions for your consideration:

What is the ideal man, the ideal woman, the ideal home and the ideal lifestyle in American Culture?

How do the media influence our definition of the ideal?

Where did notions of the ideal originate in our country – particularly for African Americans?

Why is the nature of an ideal problematic?

Why was the definition of the ideal necessary in America at a particular time (think 1950s)?

What can happen to those who do not meet the ideal?

How does Toni Morrison deconstruct the ideal in the *Bluest Eye*?

Why does Toni Morrison deconstruct the ideal in the *Bluest Eye*?

Possible sources: The Golden Age of Hollywood, The Dick and Jane Primer; Imitation of Life (film); The roles of African Americans during the early/golden age of Hollywood (Chapter 9); The division of Blacks and mulattos (Chapter 1); Shirley Temple movie clips; 1950s television shows

1. Construction: structure, style and narrative perspective in *The Bluest Eye*.

How do the choices that Toni Morrison makes in constructing her novel, help us understand her theme?

Questions for your consideration:

Why these motifs (Dick and Jane, Golden Age of Hollywood/movies/movie going)?

Why the perspective of Claudia McTeer (retrospective / reflection)?

Why begin at the end?

Why 1 year in the life (1941)?

Why multiple perspectives (Claudia, Mrs. Breedlove and third person omniscient narrator – pay attention to when the Dick and Jane Primer appears and whose perspective we are getting)

Why multiple stories within stories - Geraldine and Junior, Soaphead Church, with the main story line of the Breedlove family? How do these secondary stories relate to the main story?

1. Colorism in the Bluest Eye: Blacks and Mulattos

Questions for your consideration:

How and why does Toni Morrison set up the tension / division between blacks and mulattos and how does this division play out in the novel?

Who are the blacks – and WHY are they black?

Who are the mulattoes and why are they mulattos?

How are these two categories being defined in the text and by each group?

What is the origin of this division?

What is Morrison's ultimate message about this division?

Consider these characters: Maureen Peal; Geraldine and Junior and Soaphead Church (all pitted against the Breedloves)

Possible sources: Chapter 1 of The Color Complex, Chapter 9 of The Color Complex, Imitation of Life (film)

1. Rape, Violation and PTSS in *The Bluest Eye*

Questions for your consideration:

How is rape being defined in the novel?

What types of rape occur in the novel?

Who is violated (sexually and otherwise) and what is the consequence of this violation? Why does the rape(s) occur?

To what extent is Cholly to blame for his violence against his family? Against Pecola? Which people or circumstances might also be responsible for who he is and what he has become?

Possible sources: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, Chapter 1 of Masters, Slaves and Lovers

1. In her own words: Toni Morrison on *The Bluest Eye*

Go back to the preface of the novel where Morrison lays out her intent. Pick a quote / an idea from the preface and develop a paper where you explore how the idea plays out in the novel.

Possible Option:

If you wish to use your mini-paper/journal on the 4 types of victims of self – loathing that she outlines in the preface, as a starting point, do so.

1. **In depth Character Analysis:** _____

Choose one of the characters in the novel, and trace their evolution. Explain who they have become, and what has contributed to their evolution. Connect this character to the BBK work that we've done in this course, and to the Preface that Foreward that Morrison provides. Pay particular attention to some of the concepts that we've explored in this course, and sketch the character against these concepts, which include:

- Generational Trauma
- African American Slave Syndrome
- America's Social Hierarchy during the golden age of slavery (and beyond)
- The Color Complex
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9. **Consult with your teacher to explore an idea or thesis of your own.**

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970): Context, Content and Signification

History of Racism and Colorism:

Throughout history, people of color in the U.S., have been treated with unfairness, specifically African Americans. They have been singled out and considered as mysterious, dangerous, aggressive, threatening, criminal, and even animalistic. You might wonder what is going on here? This began when the first English Colony was established in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. Settlements were being established and the need for manual labor to gather resources like cotton, was essential to maintaining a permanent settlement. This was back-breaking work and the dependence by the colonies on the indigenous Indians, proved to be unsustainable. The search to increase the dependency of cheap labor was imperative. African Slaves were the answer; they were brought to Chesapeake Port by ship. These slaves were boarded in unsanitary conditions and not everyone survived the journey. Black slaves were considered disposable so those who died on the journey were thrown away. Can you imagine being treated that way? Like an old worn out sock that you don't have any use for anymore, so you just throw it away?

Although the first African Slave population could gain their freedom, in 1705, a law was passed in the colonies which stated that, "All negro, Mulatto and Indian slaves shall be held, taken, and adjudged to be real estate, in the same category as livestock and household furniture, wagons, and good" (*The Color Complex* 11).

Initially, the colonies not only had African slaves to clear the land and pick cotton, they also had White indentured servants doing this kind of work too. These (mostly) English immigrants, who came to America during these early colonial years, paid for

their passage with four to seven years of faithful labor to temporary owners. As these White indentured servants and African slaves frequently worked side by side in large plantations, they became friends and sometimes lovers. This caused the rapid proliferation of mulattos. In order for this race-mixing to end, White landowners conjured up anti miscegenation statutes. These laws proclaimed that sexual union between whites and blacks was twice as bad as fornication between Whites, and that sex with Blacks was equivalent to bestiality.

Despite this, some Black slaves and mulattos gained their freedom; some White masters even sent their bastard children to become educated. Some of these mulattos were able to “pass” as white, because of their light skin color. The privileges that were given to mulattos, gave many a sense of superiority (some mulattos owned land property, were educated, earned their freedom and even owned slaves). This privilege (and attitude) caused division in the Black community - division that some would say, still exists today. This separation gave rise to what we call “colorism.” Colorism refers to prejudice based on skin tone.

In Black communities, tests were designed to preserve this separation and to continue the idea that light skin blacks who could pass (because they were closer in looks to White masters, and whites in general), were better. One test used in African American communities, was the paper bag test. To be considered skin appropriate, and to be the appropriate color to join privileged communities and institutions reserved for light skin mulattos, one’s skin tone had to resemble a brown paper bag - or be lighter than the bag.

Socially and economically, mulattoes became considered “middle men” between Whites and Blacks in a three tiered social system.

In plantations, this separation was very clear; darker skin slaves worked out in the fields, picking cotton, tobacco and other products, while lighter skin slaves often worked indoors as house keepers, cooks, babysitters, drivers, butlers, and did other indoor (lighter) work. Female slaves (house slaves mostly), were frequently in danger of being raped by their masters. Masters raped their female slaves to escape from their Christianity, and as an expression of violence, possession and control. They dehumanized their Black slaves. Male Black slaves, of course, felt emasculated due to their inability to prevent masters from raping female slaves - their family members: wives, children.

It is not surprising that African American writers and artists have traditionally responded to the racist climate in America, in their works. They wished to draw attention to this situation and in some cases to contradict it. Among these artists who focus on Blacks in our racist and colorist society, on how Blacks are perceived, and on how they perceive themselves because of this past, are Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Hughes, in his short story “Passing,” emphasizes the psychological damage of a focus on skin tone, and the divisiveness of color within the Black family.

Literary Response to Colorism: Langston Hughes’ “Passing”

Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967), was an African American writer from Joplin, Missouri. He is considered the most important poet of “The Harlem Renaissance” (1920s) - a time of rebirth and explosion in art all throughout New York City, and particularly in Harlem.

His short story, "Passing" (1956), is about a young African American man named Jack, who passes as "White." Jack passes his mother on the street (the other meaning and reference to "passing" in the title of the story), and does not acknowledge her. He goes home and writes a letter to his dark skinned mother, where he justifies his passing by telling her that he is earning \$65 a week, as secretary for his white boss (Hughes 2). His boss, of course, does not know that Jack is Black. In "Passing," Langston Hughes emphasizes how pain and psychological damage can result from being something that you are not, and how passing destroyed African American families.

Jack, may not realize how painful passing is on himself and on his mother. He tells his mother how bad he felt in not being able to claim her as his own. He writes, "But, Ma, I felt might bad about last night. That's the kind of thing that makes passing hard, having to deny your own family when you see them" (Hughes 2). Jack is being forced to live a life where he cannot truly be himself. He decides to remain in the "white world," and believes that he is freer as a white man, when he writes in his letter, "Not me I'm free Ma! Free!" He is not really free, even though he thinks that he is. He thinks that he is free because he will not allow his blackness to hinder him in society. The ambivalence that Jack feels about passing is never addressed. At times, he is defensive towards his mother, and angry at her, and at other times he is apologetic. At one point, he tells her in the letter that he will deny his own children, if they are born Black. He writes, "I'm going to marry white and live white, and if any of my kids are born dark I'll swear they aren't mine. I won't get caught in the mire of color again."

The short story is a reminder of what Blacks had to endure during slavery, and still endure. Dark skin Blacks suffer more in society than lighter skinned Blacks. Light skinned Blacks were favored by their masters, and often had privileges that their dark skinned brothers and sisters, did not have. This legacy lives on. Later, after emancipation, light skinned blacks often denied access to institutions (like church), to those who were not light enough (like the paper bag tests referred to above). Black families were often separated, sold to different plantations; sometimes those that stayed, stayed because they were somehow more “appealing” to the masters. This is what makes “Passing” so sad and tragic. It reminds the reader of how fragmented Black families were and can still be when its members are different in shade. It also reminds us of how many Blacks have taken this mentality and applied it to themselves. Jack’s mother supports her son’s “passing” because it gives him access to a better life. Unlike Jack, Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman”, reclaims the incredible uniqueness of Black Women. The narrator is not silent or accepting of her life circumstance; she is proud to be absolutely “phenomenal.”

Literary Response to Racism and Colorism: Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman”

Maya Angelou’s (1928 - 2014) poem “Phenomenal Woman,” published in 1995, is about a woman who thinks of herself as extraordinary, and wants everyone else to recognize her as such. The literary devices that she uses, help the narrator translate the idea of one woman being phenomenal, to *all* women of color being phenomenal. Angelou uses imagery, repetition, and syntax to characterize the ideal woman as someone

who is confident, and who is every woman. Throughout the poem, she is able to demonstrate her confidence in herself as “phenomenal,” in a way that allows the reader to visualize her appearance, and the impression she has on others. For example, Angelou uses imagery when she states, “I walk into a room just as cool as you please, and to a man, the fellows stand or fall down on their knees” (Angelou 1). You can easily picture in your mind how very powerful her confidence is, and that her presence can cause a man to either stand or fall down on their knees. Her confidence is shown by the word “cool” to suggest that she breezes into the room without a care in the world. Another way Angelou emphasizes her confidence is in her repetition and syntactical structure for when she states, “I’m a woman phenomenally.” The way she wrote “phenomenally” after “woman,” tells you how she is ideally a woman first, and phenomenal second. She repeats the word in different variations: “phenomenal,” “phenomenally”

This poem may be read as a response to racism, because Black women have not been the subject of high regard, in life and in culture. Dating back to slavery, Black women were considered property, and were often bestialized. They were hardly considered human, so how wonderful it is that Angelou’s character is a “woman.” The ideal woman, in our society, has been defined as White, thin and often blonde. Angelou’s emphasis of her phenomenal woman’s hair and hips, counters this ideal definition. The narrator (and the author) is demanding that we reconsider what is beauty and what is ideal. Toni Morrison, picks this theme up in her novel (among other themes), and reacts against society’s ideal as represented in our media - in films - and in “The Golden Age of Hollywood,” the cultural context of her novel.

The Golden Age of Hollywood:

The Golden Age of Hollywood took place from 1915-1963, where a lot of money was made from films. It was a time where movie icons were created, and amazing milestones in film were achieved. It was characterized as a time to embrace ideals. The phrase “movie stars” came to existence. The ideal woman was curvy, feminine, sexy and White. Men were smooth, tall, dark and handsome. Stars from The Golden Age included, Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner, Hedy Lamar, Lana Turner, Cary Grant, Clark Gable and Gary Cooper. People of Color and Blacks were not represented in these films as ideal figures of beauty and acceptability. When Blacks were given roles, they played cooks, servants, butlers, and limousine drivers. Lena Horne, a light skin Black actress and singer, refused to play these servile roles. Hollywood did not know what to do with her, so she was allowed, by the movie studio who represented her, to play herself, usually a lounge singer. In some cases, Hollywood attempted to raise consciousness about race and colorism. “Imitation of Life,” is one such film that brought awareness to colorism. Several versions of this movie were made. The movie(s) focused less on race and more on colorism as it affects the African American family.

The Cultural Environment - The Golden Age of Hollywood and “Imitation of Life” (1934; 1959):

The 1934 version of “Imitation of Life” stars Claudette Colbert. The movie is based on the best selling novel of the same name. Both the novel and the film represent Hollywood’s reaction to colorism. In the film, we have a standard character, in one of the

few roles available to African American Women, which is that of the “The Tragic Mulatta.”

The tragic mulatta was a role that appeared in many hollywood films (and in literature). Her role was often cathartic to White audiences, especially White women, because her end was tragic. White women felt that the White Mulatta’s suffering was justified, because in society, she often took the attention of White men, away from White women. Because she was helpless to do anything about the rape of, and desire of Black women, White Women silently cheered when the Black Mulatta suffered. White women who could not speak for themselves, or do anything about their sexually aggressive men, often felt betrayed and turned their hatred towards the slaves who were raped:

Today, literary critics speculate as to why the mulatta tragedy was such a popular genre.

One theory holds that White females, the main reading audience for romantic fiction then and now, saw the mulatta through a veil of resentment. Southern White women, but, being ladies, they had had to look the other way. Stories featuring mulatta may have offered this segment of population a way tacitly to acknowledge the unsavory history of plantation rape; but the mulatta heroines had to die tragically, lest the stories appear to sanction miscegenation. (*Color Complex* 9)

In the film, a Black mother and her mulatto daughter (who is about 9-10), are taken in by a White mother and her young daughter (who is the same age as the mulatto child). The White mother is financially struggling, so she cannot pay the Black mother. The Black mother, who needs a job, works for room and board. The young mulatto child

grows up to deny her heritage (her mother is dark skinned). She learns to pass as white, to the disappointment of her mother (unlike Hughes' mother character, this one does not accept her daughter's passing as White). The young woman runs away from home to escape her mother. Her mother gets sick, and the young woman returns to bury her. As the mother's coffin is being taken away, the young girl falls on the coffin, hysterically, refusing to let go. Both Black and White communities are present at the funeral. In both film, at the huge funeral for the Black Woman, the camera spans to see everyone standing in respect. The young woman apologizes to her mother, and falls hysterically on top of her coffin. She has to be pulled away by the White mother and her daughter.

Although this tragic mulatta does not die at the end of "Imitation of Life," she is reduced to her "place" in society. She acknowledges her regret for trying to pass and for denying her heritage. She is punished by the death of her mother, the person who could keep her "straight," and who herself knew her place in society. The 1959 version of "Imitation of Life" keeps the same basic plot details. The main White character, played by Lana Turner, better fits America's female ideal - she is thin, white and blond (Claudette Colbert has dark hair). America's ideal family also appeared in a number of situational comedies that came out during this time period - "The Golden Age".

Cultural Representation: The Ideal American Family: "Father's Knows Best":

"Father's Knows Best" was a television sitcom that aired on CBS from 1954 to 1960. It starred Robert Young (father), Jane Wyatt (mother), Elinor Donahue (older sibling), Billy Gray (teenage brother), and Lauren Chapin (youngest child). The family

often encounters some sort of conflict, like most sitcoms do, that are resolved through their sense of family, their patience, understanding and moral upbringing. This sitcom was a great representation of the “ideal” family where the mother stays at home and the father is the economic provider. They co-parent their 3 kids, and they have a dog. The family is middle class, there is always plenty to eat, the children are overall obedient and each has his own room.

The family interacts with compassion, and the father morally guides them. Black Americans watching this show must have wondered where are they represented? Why are they not represented? And, are they worthy of representation? This sitcom, and others like it, would have reminded of the lack of access and acceptance that they have in society. Toni Morrison would pick up on this. Morrison, in *The Bluest Eye*, gives us the opposite of this ideal White family, and therefore makes a statement about the reality for Black families in seeing this, and of Black families in experiencing it. Pauline Breedlove, the main female character and mother in Morrison’s novel, is the opposite of the ideal woman and in fact spends much of her time watching the actresses of the Golden Age in movies. Cholly Breedlove, her husband, the main father in the novel, burns down the family store front house, goes to prison, and forces his family “outdoors.”

Summary of *The Bluest Eye*:

In 1941 Lorain, Ohio lives a little black girl named Pecola Breedlove, Pecola’s life has been a turmoil of tragedies. Her father, Cholly Breedlove, burned down her home, so she moves into the MacTeer's home as a foster child. There she meets the MacTeer

family, and becomes fast friends with a 12 year old girl named Claudia MacTeer (the story's now adult narrator). Claudia tells us what happened in Lorain Ohio in the year 1941. The book is broken down into seasons. In each season, we have stories of the lives of individuals, each one of which, in one way or another, contribute to Pecola's destruction. Pecola's only wish is to see the world through blue eyes. She feels that if she had blue eyes, she would see the world differently, and the world would treat her differently. As tragedies and violence continue to build up on her shoulders, Pecola is raped and bears her father's baby.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970): Purpose, Intent and Thesis

In the forward to her novel, Toni Morrison (1931 -), expresses the purpose of her book. She is inspired to look at self-loathing in the African American Community - self loathing that comes from being seen as inadequate in society. This self loathing, she argues, can lead to psychological murder. Morrison points to 4 types of reactions to "powerful self-loathing." One reaction is that it may cause you to become "dangerous and violent", while others (like her main character Pecola Breedlove), might "collapse silently" under the weight of it all.

The experience behind Morrison's writing this novel is an encounter that she had in Elementary School with a friend who told her that she wanted blue eyes. This little girl's wish, shocked Morrison. She needed to paint a picture of what life for this little girl could have been, to make her have this desire. Morrison then began thinking about this as a fictional story. In 1962, she began writing this tale, which she finished in 1965. Her focus was to show the destructive cycle of self-hatred that might inflict African American

families. She wished to focus on its most vulnerable member, a young Black, female child. *Morrison draws attention to the societal crisis of little Black girls, through the language, structure, perspective, and narrative voices of her novel. She communicates the idea of how different White America is from the African American experience, and how damaging this divide can be for little black girls in our society.* To communicate the disparity in the lives of Blacks and Whites (and Black little children and White children), she begins almost each chapter of the novel with “The Dick and Jane Primer.” It is a motif that runs throughout the novel. A motif is a recurring design or pattern in a novel that is used to establish a theme, or a certain mood, and that has symbolic meaning.

Language: The Dick and Jane Primer Motif

Morrison uses the story and the language of the primer, as an entry to most of the chapters in the novel, to mostly show what the Black characters in the story, are not. “Dick and Jane” is a prime example of the difference between the ideal American Family and Black families. Morrison inserts a portion of the “Dick and Jane” primer at the beginning of some of the most damaging chapters, and at times, within chapters. The Dick and Jane primer is introduced before the novel’s action begins. Without explanation, a page and a half of the novel is full of the same written image from the primer. This written image (or paragraph) is repeated 3 times. The first time that the paragraph appears, it is in “primer” mode. The writing is properly punctuated, and presents an image of a happy, loving family. The second time the primer excerpt (paragraph) appears, punctuation has been removed, and it is a little difficult to read, and get meaning out of it. It is still the same paragraph. The third time that the paragraph

appears, all spacing and punctuation has been removed. It is the most difficult of the paragraphs to read. The meaning should be the same, because the words are the same, but the paragraph appears garbled, muddled and confusing. It is also unattractive to the eye. Taken together, the paragraphs appear to be a statement about the ideal (first paragraph) and the imperfect (last paragraph). They represent the White American family, and what has happened to the Black American family. Although they are the same (the text is the same), they are very different. The last one is limited, uncared for, unwanted, difficult, hard to understand and does not belong.

This technique represents the collapse of the ideal signalled by the writing losing meaning and becoming distorted - collapsing into itself. The Black family, the Breedloves in the novel, is equally distorted. The novel is the story of Pecola Breedlove, the young dark skinned girl in the novel: distorted, raised in violence and seen as less than ideal. The Dick and Jane Primer is placed at the beginning of almost every chapter in the book, to at times introduce the plot, and often to contradict ideal.

The novel's structure Narrative Voices

The events in the book takes place in one year (1941), and the book is divided into seasons. Within each season, we have different stories and perspectives. Sometimes within each section, the narrative voice shifts. Even though Claudia MacTeer is the grand voice in the text, Morrison allows the voices of different characters to come through, by providing the space to tell their stories. In the case of Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, they give us insights into their own childhoods. This allows the reader to evaluate their situation in life, that will later contribute to their treatment and abuse of their daughter

Pecola. Through them, and their stories, Morrison also gives us contrasts between the ideal American man and woman, the ideal couple and the ideal family. The experiences of Blacks is very different in society (and in 1941 Ohio), than the experiences of Whites.

Toni Morrison declares in the forward to her novel that she tries to capture the way that her characters speak, the effect of which is for the characters to ring true to the reader. Through the colloquialism the personalities of each character is revealed. This way Morrison's contradicts the modern again of communication with the age and time period that the book represents. Morrison, for example, expresses the youth and immaturity of Pauline Breedlove (Pecola's mother), when she has her go back to her past, and tell us of her own childhood, by recalling how she referred to her parents as "Mama" and "Papa" (Morrison 115). The effect of this on the reader is that Pauline, who as an adult, is such an abusive and neglectful mother, was herself young, vulnerable and neglected at one time. The looking back at the adult's childhood, and carrying back the language of their tribe, even as the story moves forward, helps to communicate the generational consequence of neglect. As much as Morrison mimics the spoken language of her characters, she sometimes intrudes her voice and perspective in the novel; sometimes through Claudia's omniscient narration, and other times, as the writer herself.

When Morrison comments on the Black boys that bully Pecola in the school's playground, and call her all kinds of insulting names, the author writes, "They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds--cooled--- and spilled over

lips of outrage, consuming whatever in its path” (Morrison 65). This is all due to the upbringing of these young boys. They have been brought up by their families and communities to believe that Pecola is really “funky.” They do not understand their ignorance or that they are contributing to Pecola’s trauma, or that they themselves suffer generational trauma. This trauma leads to their “fiery cone of scorn,” unveiling only insecurities and self hatred within themselves. It is unclear here, in this quote, if Morrison is speaking as Claudia, or as herself. The observation is sophisticated and direct. In either case, Morrison is making the point that these Black boys are dumping their own insecurities on Pecola and that she carries the hate and weight of her peers. The boys are unaware of how damaging their attitudes and behavior are on this little Black girl, who wants more than anything to belong. They themselves suffer from self-hatred, and they direct it towards her. Again, Here Morrison points to the cyclical aspect of self-hatred in the African American family. These boys probably inherited it from their own parents, that were made, in a racist society, to feel less than. They are, and their parents are nothing like the Dick and Jane family. Pecola’s story is not only about how society lets her down, but also about how her parents do as well. Morrison writes, “Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws, and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed.” (Forward 10) Morrison shows brilliantly how Pecola Breedlove and Pauline Breedlove are perfect candidates of self hatred and how it leads to self destruction.

Pauline would frequent the movies, and fail to see images of herself in the faces of the stars of the Golden Age. She wants to dress and act like these stars, but she can

never be like them. Her self-hatred comes from knowing that she can never be like the Golden Stars of Hollywood. She passes this self hatred onto Pecola. When Pecola is born, her mother calls her “ugly”. Pecola, in turn, grows up literally and figuratively consuming whiteness. She learns from her mother, that there is something wrong with her. She interprets this wrong into not having blue eyes, and in not being White.

Pecola drinks milk out of her Shirley Temple cup, and eats Mary Jane candies (with a picture of a little white girl on the wrapper). She naively thinks that she will become like these little girls, if she “consumes” them. Since Pauline and Pecola have no sense of belonging, they both feel the need to change themselves in order to reach happiness. Unfortunately when Pauline lost a tooth at a young age, she realized that she would never be pretty. She delved into a cloak of self hatred for herself and for her family. Pauline comes close to Whiteness by working for a white family and “surrenders her own identity” (Forward 10). She gets satisfaction and recognition by serving White people (as a maid). She ignores her own children, and pours her attention at the little white girl who lives in the house that she cleans. Pecola, on the other hand “collapses silently.” Pecola collapses through her family’s neglect, her mother’s indifference to her, and through her interactions in the White world.

Pecola buys her Mary Jane candies from Mr. Yacobowski’s store. Mr. Yacobowski is a White manager who sits behind the counter. Pecola encounters him when she goes to purchase her favorite treat. Morrison describes how he peers down at her from the counter, with “the total absence of human recognition--the glaze separateness” as an interpretation of the racial difference. The angle of his gaze (downward at the little girl),

is symbolic of how Blacks are seen by the white world. Even though this is Pecola's story, told by Claudia, the different angles and narrative voices help to shape our impression of Pecola, and our understanding of what has happened to her - or what has led to her collapse. Even though Claudia is the dominant voice in the novel, Morrison allows others, specifically Cholly and Pauline Breedlove (Pecola's parents) to tell us about their upbringing. We can see how their own life experiences have shaped their treatment of her.

Narrative Voice: Cholly Breedlove

Cholly's chapter begins with the Dick and Jane Motif:

“SEEFATHERHEISBIGANDSTRONGFATHER
WILLYOUPLAYWITHJANEFATHER
ISSMILINGSMILEFATHERSMILESSMILE”
(Morrison 132)

Morrison's starts the chapter with the Dick and Jane primer to show the contrast between Cholly and the white father in Dick and Jane primer. In this chapter we get Cholly's insights into his upbringing. Morrison amazingly expressed Cholly's life in a way that allows readers to obtain an understanding of him and not simply hate him for what he will do. She writes in the forward, “I did not want to dehumanize the characters who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse”(Forward xii).

Cholly was abandoned by his mother and left on top of a garbage heap. He was saved and was taken in by his aunt. His aunt eventually dies and after the funeral, he has a serious encounter where he was “psychologically” raped, during his first sexual encounter with a young girl. After his Aunt's funeral, Cholly goes off with a girl. He is 14 years old. Two white men with rifles and dogs find them in the fields near his home.

They force Cholly and Darlene to continue the sexual act. They cheer and jeer them on. Cholly is ofcourse humiliated, but directs his anger at Darlene and his sense of helplessness. For the reader, this scene is a reminder of Cholly's generational past and generational trauma. Cholly may not initially understand how this encounter has affected him. We, as readers can put the pieces together. We are reminded that during slavery, masters owned their slaves and dictated their actions. Cholly is being ordered to continue with the sexual act, with a gun at his head, much like Black slaves were ordered to mate, in order to produce more slaves for the masters. He is emasculated.

Emasculation is one of the things that many slave men felt during slavery (and beyond), because they had no power to stop the masters from raping their women, and they had no power over themselves. Cholly felt emasculated, because instead of having a loving romantic experience, it was replaced with terror and self hatred; hatred because he could not do anything to fight back the White men. He is full of self hatred because the girl had to witness his emasculation/humiliation. When Cholly is "raped" during his first love encounter, it stays with him, turning him into a dangerous and violent man. He will forever associate love with violence.

After this encounter, Cholly goes in search of his father for advice and comfort. His father might be the only one who can provide him with the comfort that he needs.

Once he finds his father, Cholly is rejected by him. His father denies him, does not acknowledge him as his son, and thinks that he has been sent there to ask for money. He insults him in front of other men. Cholly goes off and soils himself. This moment represents emotional release. He goes off to clean himself off, again ashamed of what

has happened A few years later, wandering by himself, raising himself, he comes across Pauline Breedlove and runs away with her, to start a new life. They have two children; eventually his relationship with Pauline consists of fights and arguments. She is dissatisfied with herself, and he is dissatisfied with himself. They both feel inadequate. Often after their long, physically violent fights, they make violent love, while their children witness this. One day, drunk, confused and full of self pity, he comes across his daughter Pecola, as she is washing dishes at the sink. He confuses her for his wife, while at the same time knowing that she is his daughter. He rapes her, confusing violence for love. Cholly (and Pauline) have been taught by the White world that they are worthless and that violence has rewards.

Narrative Voice: Pauline Breedlove

Pauline's chapter begins with the Dick and Jane Motif also:

SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICEMO
THERWILLPLAYWITHJANEMOTH
ERLAUGHSLAUGHMOTHERLAUGHLA
(Morrison 110)

Morrison's starts the chapter with the Dick and Jane primer to show the contrast between Pauline and the Mother in the Dick and Jane Primer. The motif is ironic.

Pauline comes from a family of 12 children. She was hurt at a very young age when her foot got impaled by a rusty nail. Her foot became infected. She forever walks with a limp. Her limp, coupled with her rotten tooth, makes her "ugly." When she comes across Cholly one day, she noticed that he didn't seem to mind her injured foot, and so comes to love him and bear children with her. Soon, their love dies. Because there

is no love between them, and because her attempts at beautifying herself (like Hedy Lamar) fail, she gains comfort by organizing things. Her loneliness and her feelings of inadequacy lead her to the movies. Morrison writes, “she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen” (Morrison 122). When she realized she couldn't become like the women in the films, she continues to hate herself. She goes to work as a housekeeper in a White home, where the little girl, who is about the same age as her daughter, calls her “Polly” (while her own daughter calls her Mrs. Breedlove). Pauline “...surrender stheir identity; melt into a structure that delivers the strong persona they lack” (Preface 11). Her life as she experiences it, is violent and unsatisfactory. Her life in the White household, is the closest that she will ever get to “consuming whiteness.” Everyone in Pecola’s world seems to reinforce the fact that she is “ugly” (Morrison uses the word “ugly” especially in the Pauline and Cholly chapter, to drwa attention that their ugliness does not come from the way they look but from the way that they exist in the world). Mr. Henry, a tenant of the MacTeers, without knowing it, reinforces that Blacks, is particular, little Black girls, are not beautiful

Mr. Henry, comes to rent a room in the MacTeer household. The young girls (Claudia, her sister Frieda, and Pecola), like him becaus he pays attention to them. He speaks with them, when the other adults in the house, seem to talk at them. When he encounters Claudia and Frieda for the first time, he says to them, “You must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Ginger Rogers.” He is trying to compliment the girls, by

referring to them as the beautiful female actors of The Golden Age”. His reference for beauty is the white world. He may not see this himself, and may not understand how damaging it might be to refer to these little girls as white actresses. Morrison sees how this ideal seeps into the world and our minds. Why not just call them “pretty Black little girls?” Why refer to them by the stars of the Golden Age? Mr. Henry, like Cholly, is sexually damaging to little Black girls. At one point, he fondles Frieda, and is driven out of the MacTeer’s home by her father. Mr. Henry, like Cholly (and Soaphead Church) are men who hurt little girls. Most of the grown ups in the story, have been damaged themselves, and go on to damage others. Morrison is suggesting that the damage is cyclical.

All of these narrative voices play a role in the destruction of Pecola. Even Claudia, as an adult, reflecting on the year 1941, blames herself. When Pecola is practically homeless, wandering the streets of Lorain (her father runs off after he rapes her, her mother blames Pecola, and Pecola thinks that she has blue eyes), Claudia wishes that she would have done more for the friend who came to stay with her family after her father burned down their home. Pecola becomes a symbol of all of the little Black girls who are made to feel invisible in their society, and whose parents do not (or cannot) help them navigate a racist society. Her parents imprint their self-hatred onto her.

The Bluest Eye reminds us of the damage that we may do, when we internalize America’s societal ideals. It reminds us on how we can damage ourselves and damage others. Morrison is asking us to be careful of our expectations; she is demanding that we re-evaluate our obsession with this ideal, and how destructive it can be. Pauline and

Cholly, a product of their own upbringing, don't seem to know any better, and our historical, slave past has not helped. How do we move beyond this history? Maybe we accept it, analyze it and then break it down. We have to try to break the damage done the past. We can start by doing the opposite of what Pauline does. We can refuse to "look at a face and ... assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty. We can refuse to look at someone's race, ethnicity or race and assign it some negative value.

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