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Trauma and the Specular Dimension of the Cogito in The Bluest Eye

الصدمة النفسية و البعد المرئي للكوجيتو في أكثر العيون زرقة لتوني موريسون

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Abstract:

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* impresses the reader with the psychological complexity of the protagonist, in particular, and the other characters, in general. The novel profiles how Pecola constitutes her identity in a community fraught with constraints. The construction of Pecola's cogito "I think therefore I am" changes into Pecola's aphorism, "I am seen therefore I am". The very difference between the Cartesian cogito and Pecola's one is that Pecola invites a community of viewers to participate in the making of her identity. Therefore, this paper is mainly concerned with encounters between Whites and Blacks and the trauma they engender among Black characters in *The Bluest Eye*. Moreover, this paper will analyze the process of identification that Pecola is compelled to adopt in a community that affords a significant importance to beauty as it is standardized by the white majority.

Keywords: trauma; racism; identity; cogito; beauty; the bluest eye.

ملخص:

تعتبر توني موريسون من أهم الكتاب الأمريكيين اللذين اهتموا بالمشاكل والصدمات النفسية جراء العنصرية. في روايتها أكثر العيون زرقة (1970) تقوم الكاتبة بتحليل الصدمة النفسية التي تتعرض لها طفلة أفروأمريكية إثر بشاعتها التي تظن أنها منبثقة من سواد بشرتها. حدة الصدمة النفسية للطفلة بكونها نمت بداخلها أمل تحول لون عينيها إلى الأزرق مؤمنة أنه الحل الأنسب للعرفان بوجودها. يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحليل شخصية بكونها من خلال علاقاتها بباقي الشخصيات في الرواية مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار الآثار المعبرة التي تخلفها مواجهتها بباقي الشخصيات. يتطرق هذا المقال في الجزء الثاني إلى مبدأ الكوجيتو الديكارتي الذي يستبدل الفكر في هذه الرواية بالنظر لإثبات الوجود.

كلمات مفتاحية: الصدمة النفسية , الجمال , العنصرية , الشخصية , الكوجيتو , أكثر العيون زرقة

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the ruminative idée fixe of Pygmalion and Narcissus, we have come to ideate that no one is apathetic to beauty per se, especially if one lives in a society of spectacle. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison displays how the social circumstances that Pecola Breedlove goes through hoodwink her into believing that being beautiful is being white de facto. Pecola is perpetually striving for this ideal throughout her lust for

blue eyes and a skin color that correspond to an aesthetic orthodoxy already set out against her race by the white hegemon. Sociologically, *The Bluest Eye* is a work committed to the revision of many supremacist notions such as the one of beauty. Set in the 1940's, *The Bluest Eye* presents Pecola's abject ugliness as the binding cause of all her sufferings. In the novel, Pecola conceives of beauty as a panacea that would elevate her social status

and solve all her problems, particularly those related to her self-loathing. All the characters who meet Pecola believe that she is ugly. It follows, then, that Pecola is rejected because of her “unworthiness” to live among pretty people, beauty being a point of divergence. Pecola’s blackness is metaphorically the color that would deface a painter’s picturesque canvas of bright whiteness. *The Bluest Eye* shows how forces beyond human control, such as nature and the legacy of rejection, have been compiled to establish the heritage of desolation that has been transmitted to Pecola. For instance, the cyclical segmentation of the novel into seasons – fall, Winter, Spring, Summer – shows that the changing seasons are constants in nature not subject to human control. In the same way that the seasonal ordering of the year is unchanged, Pecola’s ugliness, rooted in her blackness, is described in the novel as “static and dread”.

This paper seeks to highlight how the protagonist Pecola is overburdened by self-loathing as a result of peoples’ judgment of her unacceptable physical traits. Thus, this paper addresses questions related to notions of beauty and ugliness as defined by the white supremacist ideals and how they become responsible of defining social relationships. Furthermore, this article aims to demonstrate how the protagonist’s hanker for blue eyes is an expectable result of her traumatic experience. This reasoning will be evidenced in this paper through the exploration of a range of cataclysmic encounters between the protagonist and other characters in the novel. These encounters prove to be the main reason behind Pecola’s trauma and her later specular definition of the *cogito*. Following this line of thought, this paper will approach

the question of identity from a Lacanian perspective. Through Lacan’s theory of the “Mirror Stage”, I will try to demonstrate how the gaze becomes an overarching element in the identification process of the traumatized Pecola. The main contribution of this paper is to highlight the devastating effect of social relationships shaped in such a dichotomous way. These social judgments have resulted in Pecola’s recourse to madness and ultimately to her social isolation as she ends up speaking to herself in the mirror. So, Toni Morrison’s work might admirably be considered as a psychological guideline to every society whose people are divided because of difference. It educates us and shows us through the suffering of Pecola the importance of tolerating difference; a value that would have saved a child like Pecola from all the troubles she had undergone.

2. Pecola’s Trauma in *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison presents the encounter between whites and blacks in shocking terms and highlights its traumatic effects on Blacks in the novel. Pointing to the traumatic encounter between blacks and whites, Fanon notes, “The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth. He is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit arises”¹. Fanon further argues that, “Not only must the black man be black: he must be black in relation to the white man”². Pecola is in this Fanonist tradition of always having to compare herself with others and perceives her identity in relation to the white other that always ends up being traumatizing. If one takes into consideration Cholly’s adolescent experience with

Darlene, trauma is also atavistic in *The Bluest Eye*. Caught by two white men making love to Darlene, Cholly is humiliated and compelled to give a dehumanizing sexual performance at gunpoint, “come on, coon. Faster. You ain’t doing nothing for her”³. The ocular encounter between the white men and Cholly exacerbate his hatred toward the White race that is genealogically transferred to his children, Pecola and Sammy.

Although not a face-to-face meeting, the first traumatizing encounter for Pecola was the one with the iconic beauty star Shirley Temple. Like her mother who could neither identify with nor mimic the beautiful stars of the Hollywood industry, Pecola’s self-worth is annihilated as soon as she encounters the beautiful hollywoodian star Shirley Temple. Claudia narrates the scene when Pecola first meets Shirley Temple’s beautiful face, “Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face. Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how cu-ute Shirley Temple was”⁴.

In this passage, being a white, blonde haired and blue-eyed woman who axiomatically conforms to the white aesthetic, Shirley Temple is in perfect symbiosis with the blue-and-white universe she is doused in. What is more, the Shirley Temple mug is a container of milk, making the relation between Shirley and whiteness tautological. The dash used to link the white and blue colors assumes that blue eyes and whiteness are inseparable and that the blue eyes Pecola dreams of would not satiate her desire to conform to the white aesthetic. Pecola stuffs herself with milk (up to three quarts of milk)

and drinks it only from the Shirley Temple mug in order to “see sweet Shirley’s face”⁵ and absorb her whiteness. Pecola’s insatiable appetite for milk connotes the irony embedded in the “Breedlove” name. The Breedlove’s frailty and incapacity to properly breed Pecola with love and nurture her emotionally induces her to consume huge quantities of milk. Thus, milk becomes a symbol that indicts Pecola’s family for their failure to properly nurture her. Moreover, drinking milk to the last drop in the Shirley Temple mug prompts Pecola to meet the hallmark of American beauty.

This experience is traumatizing to Pecola in the sense that trauma is “what happens when [what is] normally hidden by the social reality in which we live our daily lives, is suddenly revealed”⁶. Indeed, Pecola’s hideousness is relatively revealed by Shirley Temple’s beauty that is full of imprecations. The encounter between Pecola and Shirley Temple is traumatizing at all levels. For instance, Pecola starts menstruating immediately after gorging on three quarts of milk from the Shirley Temple cup. While nourishing herself to maturity on Temple’s canon of female beauty, Pecola fertilizes the soil of self-loathing whose fruits embody her interrogation “how do you get somebody to love you?”⁷ Shirley Temple provides an answer to this interrogation in her song “Be Optimistic” from *Little Miss Broadway* through the edict “just smile” to be loved even “when the road gets bumpy”. However, while Shirley Temple blames “bumpy roads” and “troubles” for her peers’ sadness, she excludes Pecola from the team throughout her imprecatory gaze that blames no one but Pecola for her misery. Werrlein notes in this concern that, “Since edicts like Temple’s “just smile” occlude the

oppressive histories that might otherwise explain Pecola's loveless family, Temple offers Pecola no one to blame but herself"⁸. It follows then that unlike Shirley Temple who can efface her sadness throughout her powerfully seducing sweet smile, Pecola's ugliness would only produce an ugly smile that implicitly refers to her eternal sadness.

Moreover, Shirley Temple is metaphorically the Temple people go to in order to worship the goddess of beauty, in this case, Shirley. She is the deity of beauty that girls like Pecola venerate. Morrison's choice of Shirley Temple might be justified by the religious undertone in Shirley's name that implies sanctity. Thus, being white and blue-eyed, Shirley Temple sanctifies whiteness and demonizes blackness. Underpinning the religious metaphorical undertone in this passage, Donald Gibson compares Shirley to a goddess and milk to chalice: "That for Pecola becomes something entirely other, a chalice, a grail whose milk-white content will allow her to take in the blood of the goddess, a white blood of milk—not a red blood of wine. The milk is the blood of the goddess because it is contained within the cup. Pecola gorges herself on the blood of the goddess; she indulges an insatiable appetite. If she drinks enough white milk from the chalice, she may become like the stuff she imbibes and as well become like the image adorning the container itself. One ingests the blood of the goddess in order to become her"⁹.

Even Claudia, who first could not join Frieda and Pecola in their conversation about how pretty Shirley was, ends up perceiving Shirley Temple as a goddess of beauty saying, "I learned much later to worship her"¹⁰. Although Shirley Temple was a symbol of healing for Americans as

Depression-era icon whose childhood puerility carries hope to the struggling nation¹¹, she does not heal Pecola of her own particular depression, but traumatizes her further. This traumatic encounter with Shirley Temple incites Pecola to gaze worshipfully at Shirley's desired blue eyes. Here, Pecola is on the verge of achieving her desired transubstantiation¹² by imagining herself miraculously transformed into the body of Shirley Temple. In fact, this transubstantiation is more acute when Pecola eats the three Mary Jane candies. This traumatic aspect of Pecola's encounter with white standards of beauty is iterative in the novel. A similar instance of the trauma Pecola experiences with the Shirley Temple cup is embedded in her encounter with Mary Jane when she buys three candies from Yacobowski's store. The Mary Jane picture on the wrapper is as fascinating as Shirley Temple's picture on the cup as the narrator explains, "Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous.

To Pecola they are simply pretty"¹³.

The ritualistic significance of eating the Mary Jane candies embodies reference to Eucharist that is emphasized by Morrison's iterative reference to trinity (Pecola has three pennies and Mr. Yacobowski gives her three Mary Janes). Transubstantiation occurs when Pecola eats the Mary Janes, or as the narrator comments, "She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes. Eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane"¹⁴. In the process of eating, the candy has been transformed into the body and blood of

Mary Jane. Donald Gibson goes further in his argument to claim that Mary Jane is a conflation of three symbolic figures: first the Virgin Mary, second God the father, and third Christ (as Mr. Yacobowski says to Pecola, “Christ, Kantcha talk?”)¹⁵.

Pecola is an inverted Virgin Mary, however, a Virgin Mary demystified: not mysteriously and spiritually impregnated by God the father but brutally impregnated by Cholly Breedlove, the father, on the dirty floor of the kitchen of her storefront home. The offspring of this union is the Christ child, the stillborn Christ child, who is incapable of saving the world because he is incapable of saving himself.

These ocular traumatic encounters foment Pecola’s desire to disappear as she whispers in the darkness of her parents’ store front home, “Please God ... please make me disappear”¹⁶. Pecola even imagines that some parts of her body disappeared, but does not succeed in getting her eyes disappear, “they were everything, everything was there in them”¹⁷. By so doing, Pecola sees all parts of her body, except her eyes, as a corporeal surplus that she has to rid herself of or metaphorically amputate. Moreover, Pecola’s failure to recognize the functionality of the other organs and her reference to her eyes as “everything” displays how this ocular trauma engulfs Pecola and incapacitates her to see herself but as an undesirable girl unworthy of a look. Having imagined the disappearance of her body and the transformation of her eyes into pretty blue ones, Pecola forces her body into a Dick and Jane abstraction. This is mainly represented through the stylistic resemblance between the Dick and Jane primer and Pecola’s oration on her illusive transformation into a pretty girl: “*Pretty*

eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes”¹⁸.

Eventually, pointing not only to a physical indication of her corporeal surpluses, “Pecola’s eyes represent her consciousness, her ability to see the “ugliness” she associates with blackness”¹⁹. Pecola shares Peola’s dreams, but she occupies a different body. Even though Schwartz perceives the additional “c” in Pecola’s name as a mistake, a “*peccatum*”, other critics perceive the additional “c” as the homophone of the verb “see” that places sight at the very center of Pecola’s persona. It is the “c”, read as “see”, that paralyzes Pecola and hinders her efforts to end up like Peola who could finally defy the negativity related to her colored race. Deborah Werrlein states that without the “c” Pecola would be obliged to live in and endure a state of blindness, that is viewed by Furman as “the awful safety of oblivion”²⁰. Werrlein further explains in this regard, “Without the ability to “see”—or without the “c”—Pecola believes she can be Peola; she hopes to enact her own blue-eyed, white-faced version of blackness. Paradoxically, for successful abstraction, Pecola must endure self-erasure *and* blindness, a self-lynching . . .”²¹.

These series of ocular insidious traumas related to Pecola’s racial phobia and internalization of shame and self-loathing culminate in her final hallucinatory dialogue with her imagined “friend”. *The Bluest Eye*, as the title suggests, is centered on the ocular perception of the “I” so that Pecola’s

definition of “self” embodies a lexicon in relation to sight, vision and view. Pecola does not passively desire blue eyes in order to be admirably seen but wants to be engaged in the activity of sight wishing her vision of the world will change when she gets blue eyes. This implies that Pecola is doomed to passivity unless she has blue eyes and that in order for Pecola to be an active member in her society of spectacle; she is urgently compelled to adopt the white aesthetic metonymically represented by blue eyes.

Pecola’s conception of identity is in Du Boisan terms fashioned according to her “double consciousness” that W.E.B. Du Bois defines as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”²². Pecola inscribes her identity in this Du Boisan register, taking the Other’s look as the only parameter throughout which she can identify. Therefore, Pecola is compelled, to use Fanon’s theory in *Black Skin White Masks*, to wear the “mask” of the dominant other in order to be recognizable in the white dominant society. It should be noted that with this schizophrenic Du Boisan double consciousness, Pecola views and judges everything against the standards of whiteness.

The bluest eye is the “I” that Pecola seeks to identify through. Blond hair, blue eyes and white skin are what constitute the pinnacles of perfection to Pecola’s mind. Presence, for Pecola, is only indicated by visibility; or as Carl Malmgren has rightly put it when commenting on the effects of the Breedloves’ ugliness, “Accepting an essentialist view of beauty . . . consigns them to invisibility and condemns them to

self-hatred”²³. Therefore, the Breedloves become the agents of their own suffering. This is true of the Breedloves, in general, and Pecola, in particular. We learn at the beginning of the novel that the Breedloves deal with their ugliness differently, each according to his conception of it. Pecola deals with hers as a “mask” that conceals her presence as the narrator puts it, “She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed – peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask”²⁴.

Being an accomplice in designing her invisibility, Pecola’s corporeal presence is never acknowledged. Peoples’ refusal to look at her is exacerbated by their refusal to look at anything related to her. For instance, the storefront where the Breedlove family lives is so gloomy that people avoid looking at it: “It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. It foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it”²⁵.

Therefore, it is no accident that people refuse to look at Pecola who lives in a dirty, disorderly space whose melancholy and gloom do not invite the human gaze. However, even when she inhabits other spaces such as school, Pecola is still invisible, and as the narrator counts, her ugliness “made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike”²⁶. “Her teachers,” the omniscient voice informs us, “had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and

called on her only when everyone was required to respond”²⁷. Pecola ends up being traumatized by this cyclic rejection and becomes an accomplice of the perpetrators of her trauma by rejecting her blackness.

3. Pecola's Definition of the Cogito

Following Sartrean theory, Morrison highlights how the community's gaze regulates Pecola's self-perception and how it produces either low self-esteem or high self-esteem. One such example is Pecola's changing perceptions of the dandelions and how they reflect her perception of herself. As Pecola passes a patch of dandelions on her way toward Mr. Yacobowski's "Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store", she wonders, "Why do people call them weeds? . . . They were pretty"²⁸. However, after the vacant gaze of Mr. Yacobowski, Pecola senses racial contempt. When Pecola enters the store Yacobowski's "eyes draw back, hesitate and hover" and he later decides "he need not waste the effort of a glance"²⁹. The narrator explains that Yacobowski "does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" and his "total absence of human recognition – the glazed separateness"³⁰, and this urges Pecola to fathom that, "The distaste must be for her, her blackness"³¹. It is this state of nothingness that Pecola is thrown into that refuses her visibility, and thus presence, in the eyes of Yacobowski, who stands for the white specular community. In Sartrean terms, Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems indicate in "The Damaging Look: The Search for Authentic Existence in *The Bluest Eye*" that: "[This event] reveals a central trope in the novel – the eyes, and their fundamental signification, which is found in Yacobowski's petrifying look. Like Medusa's look, which was capable of

turning people to stone, Yacobowski's devastates Pecola, rendering her powerless and, to some degree, symbolically dead or nonexistent"³².

Pecola suffers embarrassment at the hands of the storekeeper whose shame-inducing empty gaze destroys the happiness she experiences at the sight of dandelions. Leaving Yacobowski's store after purchasing three Mary Jane candies, Pecola passes the dandelions again and "a dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back", so she finally decides, "They are ugly. They are weeds"³³. Yacobowski's shaming stare was so poignant that it had enveloped Pecola who thought that like Yacobowski, nobody was ready to exchange a look with her, not even the dandelions. Immediately after the racist gaze of Yacobowski, Pecola transfers this hatred towards the dandelions. In this regard, Wilfred Samuels argues that Pecola's incapacity to define herself without the other's look has trapped her in what Sartre calls "bad faith" and "falsehood"³⁴. Highlighting the symptoms of "bad faith", Sartre explains, "We say indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself. We should willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general"³⁵. Eventually, Pecola shows bad faith by trying to self-negate and embody the lie, in this case, her new blue eyes. Because bad faith "has in appearance the structure of falsehood", Pecola is in Sartrean terms a template of bad faith as she "is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth"³⁶.

Samuels hinges on Sartre's definition of "the Look" in his analysis of the Breedlove family stating that Pecola as well as Pauline

and Cholly “fall victim to their failure to transcend the imposing definition of the Other’s look. Reduced to a state of objectness (thingness), each remains frozen in a world of being-for-the-other and consequently lives a life of shame, alienation, self-hatred, and inevitable destruction”³⁷.

In fact, Yacobowski’s shaming gaze discussed in the previous section has the same effect as the mirror. The whiteness of the specular community is metaphorically so transparent that it forces Pecola to see her blackness that repeatedly reminds her of her ugliness. At a very early age, Pecola ingested one of “the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought” i.e. physical beauty. The latter induced her to look for the secret behind her ugliness using a similarly destructive instrument i.e., the mirror, “Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of her ugliness...”³⁸. Metaphorically, the effect of the mirror explains how the gaze cannot be reciprocated in the case of Pecola. Taking blueness as a symbol of transparency, and blackness as a symbol of opacity, it can be argued that Pecola’s corporeal opacity is reflected through the blueness of the whites’ blue eyes and that conversely there is nothing to be seen in Pecola’s black eyes that do not reflect whiteness.

This effect of the mirror that embodies the impossibility to exchange a gaze with Pecola is the motive behind her wish for blue eyes. After Soaphead Church makes Pecola believe that she has got the blue eyes she was dreaming of, Pecola is the only one who sees her new blue eyes. The mirror, in this particular sense, stands for the utopian place that Pecola inhabits as an exile. In “Of Other Spaces” (1967), Michel Foucault

explains the heterotopian³⁹ aspect of the mirror throughout the presence-absence dichotomy when he states, “from the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there”⁴⁰. From a Foucauldian standpoint, the mirror is both a utopia because it is a virtual “placeless place” and a heterotopia in so far as the mirror “does exist in reality.” Therefore, Pecola inhabits this specific space where she imaginatively exists but realistically does not. The only reality about her new existent self is the real existence of the mirror object.

In psychoanalytical terms, Lacanian theory of the “Mirror stage” is intimately linked to Pecola’s process of identification. As defined by Lacan, “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from *insufficiency* to anticipation-and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality”⁴¹.

Therefore, the mirror stage indicates the child’s primary awareness of his incompleteness. Following this line of thought, Pecola is aware of her “insufficiency” that is embedded in two things: first her ugliness, and second her fragmentary relation with her mother. As Lacan believes that the mother is the primeval overarching other with whom the child is united in the pre-mirror stage and Pecola’s relationship with her mother is disjointed, Pecola comes into the world already incomplete. Let us recall that Pecola, like Sammy and Cholly, called her mother Mrs. Breedlove.

Coming into the world already stocked with her story of incompleteness and “lack”, Pecola is overwhelmed by her desire to overcome this condition of “insufficiency”. Eventually, what Pecola does is filling her lack by ingesting images of the white majority “other”. For instance, she drinks huge quantities of milk from the Shirley Temple cup in order to gaze at her pretty eyes and dimpled face; she also eats Mary Jane candies with the belief that eating them enables her to “be Mary Jane”. This identificatory practice shows how desire to be the “other” defines and foretells how Pecola will identify in the end of the novel. As defined by Jacques Lacan, “desire is not an appetite: it is essentially excentric and insatiable”. This definition of “desire” applies perfectly to Pecola’s wish for blue eyes that is both eccentric and insatiable. In her dialogue with her hallucinated friend, Pecola tells the latter that Soaphead Church “should have made them [her eyes] bluer”⁴².

Moreover, in this stage the child learns to identify through the two-person structure identification. Following Lacanian theory, Pecola is enmeshed in what Lacan calls the “Imaginary” that he uses to designate the relationship between the ego and images. In her analysis of Lacan’s concept of the “Imaginary”, Elisabeth Grosz clarifies, “Relations between self and other thus govern the imaginary order. This is the domain in which the self is dominated by images of the other and seeks its identity in a reflected relation with alterity. Imaginary relations are thus two-person relations, where the self sees itself reflected in the other”⁴³.

Indeed, Pecola is from the beginning of the novel until its end identifying through these reflections. She starts by identifying

her ugliness against Shirley Temple’s beautiful picture on the cup. She, then, sacrifices much of her pride in Yacobowski’s store in order to buy the Mary Jane candy whose package depicts the picture of blue-eyed Mary Jane against whom Pecola identifies. Eventually, Pecola’s identification against these reflections culminates in her identification through her mirror reflection. This final identification is the result of Pecola’s imagination. In this sense, Pecola’s mirage of her newness is very distorting as it condemns her to eternally stay in the mirror stage captured by her imagination. She is in Lacanian words offered an identity only as gestalt. “The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted”⁴⁴.

Although, in normal cases, this *Gestalt* is “more constituent than constituted”, Pecola’s *Gestalt* is the only constituent that constitutes her identity. Accordingly, Pecola’s psyche is deprived of evolution and she cannot even embody her newness. Pecola’s alter ego is only perceptible in the mirror, and it is this new perception of herself that makes her believe that her existence is now acknowledged by her community. Claudia has gone through the same mirror stage as Pecola when she expressed her hatred of Shirley Temple and dismembered the white blue eyed baby doll in order to know what it was made of. However, unlike Pecola who cannot identify without the imago she has hallucinated because she is captured in this mirror stage, Claudia succeeds in stepping up. She later learns how to deal with her difference.

The purpose behind Lacan's analysis of the mirror stage accounts for the way by which a child is able to distinguish the "I" from the "me". The mirror image gives way to a psychic response that allows the mental representation of the "I". However, Pecola does not identify her mirror image as a "me", she rather perceives of it as the "you" she is conversing with. Pecola's inability to identify her *imago* in the mirror explains how her desire has consumed her in such a way that the community of viewers she invites in her *cogito* is no more than her mirror image.

3. CONCLUSION

Pecola's way of identifying through the Lacanian concept of the *imago* is something that has been foisted on her, first by her community who did not accept her "otherness", and second by Soaphead Church who tested his psychic powers on her, by offering her the hallucination throughout which she "will live happily ever after". Tragically, this hallucinated newness becomes the only reality by which Pecola lives, or in Morrison's words, Pecola "is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self"⁴⁵.

Pecola's final definition of her *cogito* centers on what she perceives with her new blue eyes regardless of whether her look is reciprocated or not. Thus, Pecola's construction of self depends heavily on the bodily criterion of her personal identity. To put it otherwise, Pecola's relation to her body is the only determining factor of her identity. Her rejection of blackness and imaginary adoption of whiteness,

epitomized through the blue eyes, shows which group Pecola chooses to belong in.

More importantly, Pecola suffers a series of rejection that finally catapult her into a severe state of exile. Her exile is neither political, in the conventional sense, nor racial, in the contextual one; however, it is a therapeutic exile that offers Pecola relief from the constraints of her society, albeit fictitiously. As Sharon L. Gravett put it when he described Pecola's madness, "Sensitive and vulnerable, Pecola has been so neglected and abused by those around her that she eventually retreats into madness, safe from those who had told her she was ugly and unwanted; her individuality has not been prized but scorned"⁴⁶.

Claudia also conceives of Pecola's madness as consolatory when she describes her schizophrenia as "a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end"⁴⁷. Indeed, Pecola's madness would logically invert the community's gaze from an aggressive, repulsive gaze to a pitiful one, thus protecting her at least from the community's strong aversion. Therefore, Pecola's wish for blue eyes can be seen as a Faustian bargain whereby she creates and enters an imaginary world of love and security but only at the cost of her sanity. Retreating to madness, Pecola is always viewed as an "other", but more sympathetically.

In the final run, although *The Bluest Eye* is a piece of literature, it can be read as a tract that revises the notion of beauty and exhorts humanity to review its principles. However, Morrison's choice of the novel form is grounded in her belief that literature allows the voices of the oppressed and marginalized people to speak in a way that is

improbable otherwise.

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10. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p. 16.
11. Emphasizing the empowerment that union is generated by the movies of Shirley Temple that conveyed hope to American individuals. Debrah T. Werrlein points to noble themes of these movies maintaining that, "Despite the common theme of orphanhood in Temple's films, titles such as *Curly Top* (1935) and *Little Miss Broadway* (1938) preserve childhood innocence by reducing adversity to a plot device. Presaging the moralizing and harmonizing role that children supposedly played for their families during the Cold War, Temple's characters, Elizabeth and Betsy respectively, pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They both charm wayward (and wealthy) bachelors into marrying financially bereft women so that the happy couple can adopt their orphaned matchmaker". Cf. Werrlein D. (2007), op.cit, p.202.
12. The belief that the bread and wine of the Communion service become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ after they have been blessed, even though they still look like bread and wine. This is celebrated in Christendom as Eucharist, the ceremony wherein people eat bread and drink wine in memory of the last meal that Christ had with his disciples.
13. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p.38.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid, p.37.
16. Ibid, p.33.
17. Ibid, p.34.
18. Ibid, pp.34-5; emphasis in original.
19. Werrlein D. (2007), op.cit, p. 204.
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24. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p. 29.
25. Ibid, p. 24.
26. Ibid, p. 34.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid, p. 35.
29. Ibid, p.36.
30. Ibid.
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33. Morrison, T.(1999), op.cit, p. 37.

34. In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean Paul Sartre discusses the concept of “bad faith” (*mauvaise foi*) synonymously with the act of lying. Highlighting how lying is a form of self-negation, Sartre argues “doubtless it happens often enough that the liar is more or less the victim of his lie, that he half persuades himself of it. But these common, popular forms of the lie are also degenerate aspects of it; they represent intermediaries between falsehood and bad faith. The lie is a behavior of transcendence”. Sartre, Jean Paul (1943), *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. 1943. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (1969) Routledge, England, p. 48.

35. Sartre J.P. (1969), p. 48)

36. Ibid, p. 49.

37. Samuels W. & Hudson-Weems C. (1990), op.cit, p. 10.

38. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p. 34.

39. Heterotopia is a concept in human geography first coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault in a lecture entitled “Of Other Spaces” (1967) to specify places which are neither here nor there. Foucault gives the example of the mirror when he explains, “The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I

look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” Foucault. Michel. (1984), “Of Other Spaces; Utopias and Heterotopias”, *Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuité*, (originally published as “Des Espaces Autres”, March 1967), trans. Jay Miskowiec, Available from <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>, p.4.

40. Foucault M. (1984), op.cit, p.4.

41. Lacan, Jacques (1977), *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton, New York, p. 3; emphasis in original.

42. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p. 160.

43. Grosz, Elizabeth (1990), *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. Routledge, New York, p. 46.

44. Lacan J. (1977), op.cit, p. 2; emphasis in original)

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47. Morrison T. (1999), op.cit, p.163.