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## Idealism and Disillusionment: A Social Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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### **Abstract:**

The African American people have been victims of a system of internal colonialism which has its origins in their forced importation from Africa and enslavement in America. The legacy of slavery has left serious repercussions in contemporary America for both blacks and whites. Though slavery as an institution was abolished more than a hundred years ago, the ideas surrounding it have failed to be eradicated, perpetuating the ideology of racial inequality in every sphere of life. The blacks in America therefore, suffer not only from social and economic inequalities but also from heavy psychological consequences. Toni Morrison is an African American writer who addresses the African experience in white America through her writing. She highlights the relation between social power and individual psychology and gives voice to those traumatized by oppressive and dominant social forces. This paper is an attempt at analyzing her novel *The Bluest Eye* from a social psychological perspective highlighting how she has fictionalized this connection in the portrayal of her characters.

### **Keywords:** Internal colonialism, slavery, racial inequality, psychological oppression

Even though slavery as an institution was abolished more than a hundred years ago (1865), the ideas surrounding it have failed to be eradicated, perpetuating the ideology of racial inequality in white America. The African Americans therefore continue to live with the shadow of slavery in the form of racism and are subject to a system of internal colonialism. This has resulted in serious psychological repercussions. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is Toni Morrison's first novel which deals with the problematic theme of black characters resorting to pathological behaviour in an attempt to create an authentic self within a society in which the dominant culture undermines one's sense of worth. Her initial inspiration was provided by an old school friend who longed for blue eyes. Morrison was troubled by the fact that the little girl's desire has an implicit element of racial self-loathing. She began writing this novel in the sixties when the civil rights movement and the reclamation of racial beauty in the United States began to stir her thoughts about the necessity of the claim. In an afterword to the novel (1993), she says that "the assertion of racial beauty was ...a reaction against the damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable

inferiority originating in an outside gaze" (Morrison 168). In *The Bluest Eye* therefore, she explores the "social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart" (*Ibid*). She questions:

Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale?  
The novel pecks away at the gaze that condemned her. (Morrison 167)

The gaze that condemned her originates in the society in which she exists. As an African American, she is a member of the marginalized group of people who live within a dominant and oppressive white culture. As psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs have pointed out in the book *Black Rage*, "the culture of slavery was never undone for either master or slave. The civilization that tolerated slavery dropped its slaveholding cloak but the inner feelings remained" (26). Forced to play an inferior role, the African Americans suffer from the destructive effects of white society which can take various forms, but "oppression in Morrison's world is more often psychic violence" (Davis 323). According to Gurleen Grewal, the novel shows a "keen grasp of the way power works, the way individuals collude in their oppression by internalizing a dominant culture's values in the face of great material contradictions" (20-21). *The Bluest Eye* explores how the traumatic experience of social powerlessness and devalued racial identity prevents the African American community from joining together and truthfully evaluating the similarity of their circumstances, much less finding ways to oppose dominant forces. Instead, we find that they resort to various neurotic strategies for their own survival in a hostile environment.

The novel is set in the 1940s which was a period of heavy migration of blacks from the rural South to the North in search of more jobs. As Susan Willis notes, it was a "strategic moment in Black American history, during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation" (qtd in Gates 265). Blacks were struggling to assimilate the ways of the larger culture, and the distinctive cultural ways nurtured by them in slave communities were constantly under threat. Trudier Harris has rightly observed that the geographical setting of Lorain, Ohio, is perhaps a reflection of "one of the greatest beliefs in black communities during and after slavery that the north is a freer place for black people economically and socially...it was irrelevant that some blacks arrived in the North and found conditions hardly better than the ones they thought they were escaping in the South" (McKay 68).

From the very beginning, Morrison establishes the relation between the social environment and personal history by giving a detailed account of the condition in which the blacks exist in white America. She uses a white family primer to foreground the irony and wide gap between what is shown in it as the ideal white family living in luxury and comfort, and the poor, deprived black world that is to be portrayed in the novel:

Here is the family, Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green –and –white house.  
They are very happy. (Morrison 1)

The use of the primer showing the ideal white family portrays a form of institutionalized racism which was perpetuated through the system of education. It points out the existence of two separate societies in America, demonstrating the reality of the situation in which the blacks live and the white sanitized version that is presented to them as ideal. The inculcation of the values of the dominant culture results in the “hegemonic norm of identity acquired through mimicry” (Grewal 23).

The story, revolving around Pecola Breedlove, a little black girl who wanted to have blue eyes, is told by her friend Claudia who also serves as the first person narrator in the novel. In the prologue, she informs the reader of the tragedy of 1941 - Pecola's baby by her father was born dead, and the marigolds failed to bloom. She is overwhelmed by the incident and says:

There is really nothing more to say - except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*. (Morrison 4)

The entire novel is dedicated to describing the events that led to the tragedy. Barbara Christian and Gloria Wade-Gayles have rightly noted that “how Pecola comes to want blue eyes demands more than just telling Pecola’s story”. It also demands telling the story of “three hundred years of unsuccessful interface between black and white cultures in a small Ohio town”(Wade-Gayles 67). In the process of telling the ‘how’ Morrison reveals the ‘why’.

The blacks in America are forced to endure a constant friction between their self-image and the image prescribed and dictated by white authority. This dark racial reality has made them victims of a cultural and psychic split that results in developmental inhibition and the need for pathological survival strategies which are expressed in neurotic behaviour. Morrison’s portrayal of her characters’ response under such pressure is on the clinical pattern of Karen Horney’s psychological theory. Horney speaks of the necessity of “favourable conditions” for the realization of an individual’s real self. By the ‘real self’, she means the “central inner force, common to all human beings and yet unique in each, which is the deep source of growth” (Horney 17). Adverse influences can develop inner stress and hamper a person’s healthy development leading him to become alienated from his real self. This would result in what Horney calls the ‘neurotic process’ (13). A close analysis of the novel shows that the oppressive social conditions are not conducive for healthy psychological development.

The socio-economic difference between the blacks and the whites is made evident in the opening chapter itself. Rosemary Villanucci, a white girl and neighbour of the two black girls Claudia and Frieda, sits in her father’s new car “eating bread and butter”, an object desired by the latter two. In a gesture of racial and class exclusion, she tells them they can’t come into the car. The humiliating experience produces anger and fantasies of revenge in Claudia:

We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of arrogance that curls her chewing mouth. (Morrison 5)

This is a clear illustration of the fact that poverty and race are factors under which the blacks suffer social discrimination and oppression. It also points out the way in which the personal and the social relate to each other.

A further account of Claudia's world continues to serve as a contrast to the Dick and Jane primer. Claudia and Frieda have to go to the railroad tracks and collect the tiny pieces of coal lying about. As they walk home, they watch the red hot slag from a mill being poured into the ravine. "It is impossible" says Claudia, "not to feel a shiver when our feet leave the gravel path and sink into the dead grass in the field" (Morrison 5). Through this image of abject poverty Morrison suggests the alienation and distance of blacks from the white-dominated economic world. Though the mills produce great heat in the making of goods, the blacks are obliged to scrounge for leftover pieces of coal to heat their cold and frigid houses. Claudia says:

Our house is old, cold and green.....Adults do not talk to us- they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information...How, they ask us, do you expect anybody to get anything done if you all are sick? (Morrison 5-6)

It is a world in which the stress of poverty directs the attention of adults to such basic issues of survival that they can barely nurture and provide the care and attention needed by their children. That is why "illness is treated with contempt" (6). When she is sick, Claudia's mother comes in the night to make her comfortable. She knows that her mother is someone "who does not want me to die" (7). But there is always the broken window from which the cold air comes in. It needs to be stuffed with rags because they cannot afford to have it fixed. Racism and economic exclusiveness of the external world propels the blacks into stressful poverty which in turn places pressure on family relations.

Pecola the protagonist is introduced as a girl with "no place to go" (11), who comes to share a bed with Claudia and her sister Frieda. She is defined as a character by her yearning. Ignored and unwanted by her own parents, Pecola grows up in an uncaring and unpromising environment which is in total contradiction to the favourable conditions which Horney speaks of. At home she is repeatedly exposed to the ritualized violence that her parents direct toward each other and their children. While her older brother Sammy could run away from home, Pecola, "restricted by youth and sex" (32) had to endure the domestic violence. At school, she is constantly ridiculed by other school children because of her dark skin, poverty and ugliness. White attitude toward blacks is exemplified in Pecola's encounter with the storeowner Mr. Yacobowski:

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition – the glazed separateness... She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. (36-37)

Pecola's sense of isolation and alienation is almost complete, for all she has learned about herself from home, from school, from her peers and the world around her is that she is black, poor and ugly - the antithesis of all that society values.

Pecola's 'basic anxiety' takes root because she is unable to develop a feeling of belonging in such an environment. She is rendered incapable of relating herself to others. The family forms the immediate social environment of a child. Therefore Horney's theory stresses that parental indifference during childhood is a basic cause for neurotic development in the neglected victim (18). Similarly Grier and Cobbs in their study of the inner conflicts of blacks in America have pointed out that "the first measure of a child's worth is made by her mother" (40). Pecola cannot obtain a sense of worth from her mother who rejects her or from her father who rapes her. Under inner stress, therefore, she fails to realize her own potentials and becomes alienated from her real self. Horney says that because of the feeling of inferiority, the individual alienated from himself needs something that will give him a hold, a feeling of identity. If the inner conditions do not change, "gradually and unconsciously, the imagination sets to work and create in his mind an idealized image of himself" (Horney 22). Pecola, believing that her problem lies in her black skin and ugliness, prays to God to make her disappear. It occurs to her that "if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 34). In her desire to be accepted by others she comes to believe that her problem will be solved if she can acquire blue eyes because that is the accepted norm of beauty and worth.

Pecola's need to have blue eyes is not a spontaneous feeling or desire but it is a compulsive need which arises out of her basic anxiety. Pecola works toward actualizing her idealized image and starts despising her real self. Her obsession with blue eyes is seen in her love for Shirley Temple, the blue-eyed child movie star, and the Mary Jane Candies which she eats, imagining that "to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" - who had blonde hair and blue eyes (Morrison 38). She prays for this transformation and enters the neurotic's world, believing that it will give her a perfect white vision. What she does not realize is that the kind of beauty she longs for is prescribed and based on white standards of beauty. It is a racist ideology which has been internalized by both blacks and whites.

By internalizing this ideal of beauty and worth, Pecola attributes the imperfections of the world to her own defective perfections. She believes that the source of her unhappiness is her own personal ugliness and wishes to be other than herself. She measures herself with what W.E.B. Dubois calls "the tape" of the other's world and can see herself only through "the eyes of others" (Rivkin 869). With the bluest eyes, she thinks the world would say "we mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison 34). She feels that she "should" have not just blue eyes but the bluest eyes in the whole world. Her disturbing question regarding how "you get somebody to love you" (23) remains unfulfilled and unanswered, leading her to self-hatred and

self-destruction. She finally degenerates to schizophrenia and madness believing that she had been granted her wish of blue eyes by the pervert Soaphead church.

Pecola's tragedy can be traced back to her parents. Horney says that "a child may not be permitted to grow according to his individual needs and possibilities" because "the people in the environment are too wrapped up in their own neurosis to be able to love the child"(18). Morrison's omniscient narrator shifts back into the past to trace the stories of Pecola's parents Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, revealing in the process, that they are indifferent to her needs because they are too wrapped up in their own neurosis to be able to love her. Both Pauline and Cholly are powerless themselves, subject to the whites who employ them and victims of their poverty and culture which invalidates them. Moreover, they have both been physically or emotionally abandoned by their families.

Pauline Williams was the ninth child among eleven children. She grew up in a poor Alabama sharecropper's family that lived seven miles from the nearest road. Pauline has a physical handicap, a slight limp, which resulted from a wound she suffered when she was only two years of age. Her parents have no time for parental embraces and the negligence by her parents leads her wound to develop into a permanent limp. Slight as it was, this deformity made her feel like an outsider in her own family and she has always worn a shroud of shame. She "never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged any place" (Morrison 86). She believes that her "feeling of separateness and unworthiness" (Ibid) is because of her foot. Her profound sense of insecurity makes her withdraw from others and she tries to be self-sufficient in her own private pleasures.

When Cholly appears in her life, Pauline moves towards him hoping to be embraced by his strength and promise of rest. Pauline and Cholly did love each other initially but their happiness is short-lived:

They agreed to marry and go 'way up north, where Cholly said steel mills were begging for workers...they came to Lorain, Ohio. Cholly found work in the steel mills right away and Pauline started keeping house. (90)

Usha Puri rightly observes that Pauline's response to the North is an example of the "cultural transplantation of the Southern women to the North and its inimical impact upon their married life" (11). After their migration to the Northern urban city, Cholly takes up job and Pauline is again enveloped in her sense of loneliness and isolation as she struggles to accommodate herself to city ways:

Everything was looking good. I don't know what all happened. Everything changed. It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks...northern colored folks was different too...no better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was the lonesomest time of my life...I didn't even have a cat to talk to. (91)

In an interview with Rosemary K. Lester, Morrison says that since the South was segregated, “you really didn’t come into contact with white people” but being “in a community of black people one felt safe, you know, fairly happy”(50). But in the North, Pauline is brought into confrontation with whites on a daily basis. She can neither assimilate with the whites nor with the urban black folk who had formed a kind of middle class in the cities. Her feeling of ‘separateness’ and ‘unworthiness’ is intensified by her experiences of exclusion and loneliness. Here she was confronted by prejudice on a daily basis, both classism and racism; and for the first time, she is introduced to the ideas of white standard of beauty and romantic love which Morrison considers as:

... probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. (95)

She tries to escape her loneliness by conforming to the expectations of those she envies. By fully internalizing this dominant ideology, she comes to believe that she ‘should’ be living up to the white ideals. Her already fragile sense of identity is effaced gradually and she becomes alienated from her real self. She tries to improve her physical appearance by adopting the styles of other city-bred women because she wanted others “to cast favorable glances her way” (Morrison 92).

According to Horney, the self-effacing person tries to solve “his inner conflicts by suppressing all expansive attitudes and drives and making self-abnegation trends predominant” (216). As noted by Showalter et al, Pauline “descends to self-abnegation, then to abnegation of her (storefront) home life, and ultimately of her entire family” (217). Her feeling of alienation makes her deny the harsh reality of existence. She develops an obsession for everything white and contempt for anything that reminds her of her real self. Thus she moves towards the idealized image of physical beauty which she equates with virtue and starts despising her real self.

Her marriage with Cholly becomes “shredded with quarrels” (92). Her “trading of myth for reality” (Harris 69) becomes detrimental for all of them. Pecola’s desire for blue eyes is in fact an inheritance from Pauline herself. Her desire is to look like the actress Jean Harlow. “And the world itself agreed with her” (Morrison 100). Everything in the society seems to reiterate the secondary and inferior position of the blacks. These ideas are perpetuated through the movies, hoardings, white dolls and Shirley Temple mugs. It is an ideal she can never measure up to because the black woman is “the antithesis of American beauty” (Grier and Cobbs 41). She gives up trying to look like a movie star when she loses a tooth at the movies and realizes the gross distance between her reality and the illusion of the movie world:

I don’t believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then...I just didn’t care no more...and settled down to just being ugly. (96)

She plunges into self-hatred because she cannot live up to the ideal of beauty. As Wade-Gayles notes, "the tragedy of the incident is not Pauline Breedlove's loss of the front tooth but her use of fantasies to help her cope with reality" (74).

Nevertheless, she continues to seek approval in the eyes of others. In the kitchen of the Fisher family where she works, she finds praise and luxury. It is the one place where she feels a sense of power. Though they appreciate her only as "the ideal servant" (Morrison 99), she misinterprets their sentiments for love and acceptance. In her need to lift herself above others, she becomes further alienated from her home and family because they cannot give her the sense of worth she so desperately needs. Pauline begins to move against her family because they remind her of her real self. Her self is split between the 'real' and the 'ideal' and she lives in two worlds, both physically and in her mind. Her neurosis is made evident when her compulsive need to maintain her ideal image makes her strike her own daughter Pecola and comfort the white child whom she cares for. She fails to acknowledge Pecola, her own flesh thereby denying her own 'real self'. As Wade-Gayles notes, "Pauline rejects her own daughter because she has erased from her psyche the line separating reality from illusion" (140). Instead, she displaces her frustrations on to Pecola.

Cholly's life is another extreme example of the psychological effects of white racism and black poverty. Abandoned by his mother, he is rescued and brought up by his great aunt Jimmy. When aunt Jimmy dies, all caring and positive influence disappear from Cholly's life and he is left all alone at the age of fourteen. Besides this, the most formatively brutalizing incident in Cholly's youth is the intervention of his first sexual encounter by armed whites. His sense of isolation is further heightened by the feeling of emasculation and humiliation. His incapability to react to the situation makes him direct his anger on his fellow victim Darlene:

Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, and helpless. (118)

His reaction reflects the power the whites enjoy in the society and the feeling of helplessness of the black man. Prevented from looking outward at the oppressor, he displaces his anger on to the girl: "All he can do to restore his selfhood is to deny hers further" (Davis 330). The effect of his psychosexual oppression proves to have devastating consequences in his later life. After this humiliating incident, Cholly goes in search of his father who he has never met. But when he manages to locate him in Macon, his father is more interested in a game of cards than in any lost son of his. The pain of being rejected by his father makes him regress and he soils himself like a baby. The environment depicted by Morrison illustrates that the hostile racial atmosphere in the society nurtures unnatural parents "who abandon their children and leave them victims of psychological scars" (Koshi 167).

After these traumatic experiences, Cholly feels that he has nothing more to lose. His coping strategy is to move away from people. He becomes detached and lives for himself. Growing up without ever having had a parent model, he opts for freedom without responsibilities and devotes himself to his own desires and perceptions. He becomes “dangerously free” (Morrison 125). No one cared for him, so he cared for none. His strategy is to live life devoid of all social ties. Because of the lack of parental care and nurturing that would have made him develop his real potentials, he is rendered incapable of developing a consistent sense of self and self-worth. He feels that the whole world is hostile to him. Horney says such a person “unconsciously rejects both achievement and effort” (261). Morrison suggests that because of the way he lived, “the pieces of Cholly’s life could become coherent only in the head of a musician” (125).

But when he meets Pauline, Cholly begins to move toward her. Their initial love and marriage help him to cope well for a while, but the environment fails to sustain him after their migration to the North and things begin to fall apart again. He is employed in a steel mill, but because of the pressure of competitive society and the discrimination of classism and racism, he lands up in debt and takes to drinking. Moreover, marriage as an institution is “a curious and unnatural idea to him” (Morrsion126) since he has never had a real family or known his parents. When the children appear, he becomes totally dysfunctional as a parent:

Having no idea how to raise children; and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be... As it was, he reacted to them, and his reactions were based on what he felt at the moment. (126-27)

Cholly’s is a twisted psyche which has resulted “from his inability to sustain his family economically in a world that both makes it impossible for him to do so yet demands that he must”(Lubiano 588).

Individuals who suffer from helplessness feel the compulsive need to restore their sense of self by imagining themselves superior to others. Cholly has always had to be on the defensive in the larger society and so now he directs his frustrations on victims easiest to procure - his family. Wade-Gayles rightly notes that “racism denies Cholly power in the larger society; [but] sexism gives him power in the privacy of his home” (141).Cholly moves against his wife and children in his domestic life. This results in a confused and damaging irresponsibility and proves to have devastating consequences when he rapes his own daughter Pecola. When Cholly sees her sad and unhappy figure, he is angered by his inability to provide for, and give his love to her. At the same time he is also confused by his own desperate need for love. His action further results from self-hatred because she reminds him of himself – small, black and helpless. He rapes her in his confused attempt to give her the love he feels incapable of giving, and also to rid himself of the guilt for his own inability. Through this tragic incident, Morrison shows that the failure to be loved properly results in the failure to love properly.

The Breedloves suffer psychologically in the form of daily, grinding oppression, whereby the parents pass their suffering on to their children. Cholly's rape is a physical manifestation of the social, psychological and personal violence that he puts upon Pecola. Pauline reacts by blaming Pecola for the rape and puts her out. Cholly and Pauline remain incapable of providing the fertile, parental soil a child needs to grow and develop a positive sense of self. In portraying the emotional violence displaced on to children by parents, Morrison explains that she was attempting to show "the nature and relationship between parental love and violence" (Samuels 14). Though she attributes such mistreatment of children to adults who have also been brutalized, she nevertheless does not condone their abuse of power. She sees their displacement of anger and withdrawal from life as an escapist strategy. But as Davis correctly notes, Morrison is "tempered in her condemnation by the recognition of the unnatural position of blacks in a racist society" (327).

Morrison clearly illustrates that their behaviour is determined by the historical and social conditions. During their childhood, Pauline and Cholly had in some small measure, experienced a sense of community in the South. They lose their cultural roots in their attempt to become urbanized after their migration to the North. But Pecola is "never given an opportunity in any realm (home, school, playground), to see anything positive in herself as she is" (Harris 73). Her sense of isolation is more intense because "in her detachment from her cultural heritage, Pecola exists unprotected from the disastrous effects of standards that she cannot achieve" (Awkward 188).

The black community in *The Bluest Eye* reacts with contempt toward its own oppressed victims. We learn through Claudia that their action of distancing themselves from people like the Breedloves is in fact, a self-protecting measure. Horney has examined the neurotic characteristic of externalizing self-hatred as a measure for "sheer self-preservation" (208). She says the "condemnatory attitudes toward others" (210) stem from the neurotic's own dire need to externalize self-hatred. Hence they hate and despise in others all that they suppress and hate in themselves. In the novel, the people of the black community imagine themselves morally superior to the society's pariahs forgetting that they themselves are considered the 'pariah community' in American society. Living in such an environment, the community makes Pecola a scapegoat by displacing all their frustrations on to her:

All of us - all who know her - felt so wholesome after we cleansed ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness...we honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (163)

This 'fantasy' is the condition in which they exist. They try to hang on to a sense of power by subjugating those that are weaker. Therefore, they all suffer from some aspect of Pecola's

neurosis. Even Claudia thinks that Pecola is partly to blame for her inability to react against those who mistreat her: "And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt" (163).

However, such a reading does not take into account the fact that Pecola was brought up by her mother with a "fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (Morrison 100). Her response of withdrawing from people is determined not by her instinctual behaviour but, as a result of the circumstances produced by her environment. Destruction is not always in sporadic physical forms but is rather a continuous and relentless process which gradually erodes the psyche of the oppressed. *The Bluest Eye* makes clear the constriction of the growth of the self to restrictive and oppressive cultural circumstances. For all the Breedloves, trauma stems from their devastated love-deprived lives, from a barren cultural landscape:

This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong of course... (Morrison 164)

Claudia's words make it clear that the oppressed and traumatized in the 1940s America cannot help one another because the only power they have available to them is that of feeling superior to the weakest. They live under the dominant white culture in which they are denied equal status and treatment. This denies them self-confidence and a sense of security. Therefore, the black psyche in *The Bluest Eye* remains unhealed.

Morrison is sensitive to the question of how the social construction of individuals and the internalizing of inferior status can be formidable and brutal. But though she is critical of white racist oppression she is also aware of the black community's own role in perpetuating racism. She shows in the novel that the psychological oppression is so great that it can preclude one's overcoming of it. This kind of oppression and resulting psychic vulnerability will continue to be perpetuated unless the traumatic experience of its victims are collectively shared and articulated. She serves this purpose by describing their experiences through her fiction.

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