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The Troubled Void Within Doubled Identities: Unattainable Act of "Passing" in *The Bluest Eye*

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* assesses the negative impacts of social beauty standards and the psychological estrangement that black people confront. The work probes the ways in which people can be deeply affected by their environments and life experiences, leading to substantial changes that not only affect their own lives but also have a significant impact on those around them. The story's characters experience a range of disappointments, including the realization that their dreams for the future are unattainable. These setbacks draw attention to deeper social problems that encourage exaggerated ideals of beauty and prosperity and sustain vicious circles of exploitation. This article, in this context, explores the theme of "passing" in the novel, analyzing how characters shape their perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. Their personal experiences of various metamorphoses lead them to internal transformations, ultimately culminating in the cycle of self-destruction that shrouds their family.

Keywords: *American Literature, Passing, The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison*

Çift Kimliklerin İçindeki Sorunlu Boşluk: *The Bluest Eye*'da Ulaşılamaz "Geçiş" Eylemi

ÖZET

Siyahilere yönelik estetik standartların ve psikolojik ötekiliğin zararlı sonuçları Toni Morrison'ın *The Bluest* Eye adlı eserinde açıklanmaktadır. Eser, insanların çevrelerinden ve yaşam deneyimlerinden nasıl derinden etkilenebildiklerini ve sadece kendi yaşamlarını etkilemekle kalmayıp çevrelerindeki insanlar üzerinde de büyük etkileri olan önemli değişikliklere yol açtıklarını anlatmaktadır. Hikayenin karakterleri, geleceğe yönelik hayallerinin ulaşılamaz olduğunu fark etmek gibi çeşitli hayal kırıklıklarına uğrar. Bu hayal kırıklıkları, abartılı güzellik ve refah ideallerini teşvik eden ve sömürü döngülerini besleyen daha derin toplumsal sorunlara dikkat çeker. Bu makale, bu doğrultuda, romandaki "geçiş" temasını inceleyerek, karakterlerin kendilerine ve dünyadaki yerlerine ilişkin algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiklerini analiz etmektedir. Karakterlerin çeşitli değişimleriyle ilgili kişisel deneyimleri onları içsel dönüşümlere yönlendirmekte ve nihayetinde ailelerini saran öz-yıkım döngüsüyle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Amerikan Edebiyatı, Geçiş, The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's momentous work of African American literature, *The Bluest Eye*, enables the reader to observe how a person or a culture is suppressed by external factors, and thus, how these factors ultimately disappoint and transform people and society agonizingly. These downtrodden individuals are pushed into the category of 'outsiders' by the 'typical' members of society, causing a significant emotional impact on them. Consequently, this experience shapes their personal growth and propels them towards diverse paths in their journey as human beings. Morrison's novel includes the life story of a little and 'peculiar' girl named Pecola and those around her who are afflicted with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, a term coined by Joy DeGruy who defines it as "a form of slavery that was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites" (2017, p. 9). Moreover, she explains it as "the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities…" (ibid.), and this depiction is vividly portrayed in the novel as individuals from various backgrounds, regardless of their race, subscribe to the notion of white supremacy.

The outsiders strive to conform and adapt to this dominant ideology in order to endure in society. Within society, the concept of equality among all individuals is not embraced, and certain people are stigmatized as different and lesser. As a result, these experiences escalate, fostering feelings of self-hatred and ultimately compelling the individual to face a transformative shift. That results in Du Bois's notion of 'double consciousness,' whereby inward identity and outward expression are reshaped under social pressure. This double consciousness may lead the African American subjectivities "to adopt specific roles or identities from which he or she would otherwise be barred by prevailing social standards'' (Kennedy, 2005, p. 283).

When W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "double consciousness" to characterize the shattered sense of self that African Americans felt as they were forced to view themselves through the eyes of a dominant white society, it showed that it is, in effect, a strategy for overcoming systemic racism and creating psychological conflict. He frames it as "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," a condition that forces individuals to measure their worth against the "tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 2003, p. 9). Frantz Fanon expanded this perspective by analyzing the colonial subject's desire to assimilate into the colonizer's culture. In his 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, he shows how racial passing, in which the subject adopts the language, customs, and even desires of the dominant group at the expense of self-alienation, performs as both a means of surviving and a kind of oppression. Following these ideas, Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* presents the concept and the act of "passing" clearly. In her book, a light-skinned African American woman, Clare, decides to pass for white and get married to a white man, but she ultimately struggles between her commitment to her African American history and the chances offered to her as a white woman. However, the concept of passing, rather than the act itself, is rooted in racism as it is inextricably linked to the one-drop rule (Khanna, 2010, p. 381).

Larsen also mentions that "passing" is a paradoxical term since it is a blend of "disapproval and admiration, protection and a subtle shying-away" (2007, p. 39).

Wishing to assimilate themselves, the characters start to transform and leave their own lives, attempting to "pass" as members of the repressive side in order to gain social acceptance and privilege. The concept of passing, therefore, has been central to discussions of racial identity, assimilation, and double consciousness. "Passing," in other words, is actually a strategy used by individuals in this novel to escape the limits of their own race and find acceptance and belonging in a culture that prioritizes whiteness. To obtain approval and a feeling of being part of a culture that prioritizes whiteness above all else, the characters in *The Bluest Eye* use this idea as one means to break free from the constraints of their own race. Geraldine, who makes an effort to qualify for white in the book, is referred to as having a thought that "niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, 1970, p. 72), so his kid cannot play with them. In other words, she motivates her son, Junior, to disassociate himself from his African American origin and jealously defends her standing as a member of the community of white people. Morrison notes that her African American characters are not seeing themselves through their own eyes or the eyes of their community, but rather through the perspective of a "White eye." The issue is not just their origins, but they internalize these external ideals, leading them to reshape their appearance or behavior to fit in. In doing so, they may suppress or lose parts of their natural identity, heritage, and self-expression (Denard, 1998, pp. 6-7).

Meanwhile, the character of Maureen Peal is able to "pass" and is deemed more socially acceptable and affluent because of her lighter skin tone and more European traits, such as her long, flowing hair. Maureen, who is often described as beautiful and exotic, associated with the image of "a sleek and graceful panther," representing her power and self-assurance, which are qualities that Pecola lacks, uses her "unique and superior" characteristics to her benefit. In this sense, she can be friends with the other girls. Even Maureen, though, has her own issues with belonging and identity. In the end, Maureen's demise turns out to be just as empty and unfulfilled as the efforts of the other characters to live up to white standards of beauty. She contends she might flee the poverty and persecution she faces as a black woman if she can just get all the amenities of white middle-class respectability, including a tidy house and fine clothes.

The narrative ultimately demonstrates that evading unfair treatment and prejudice by means of passing is a misguided and problematic approach. The protagonists become disconnected from their own histories and communities as a result of their attempts to assimilate into a dominant culture and suppress their identities. By promoting the notion that whites are superior to blacks, they simultaneously support the very oppressive institutions that they are attempting to escape. The story portrays "passing" as a type of self-hatred and a way to maintain social inequalities rather than as a way to overcome them. The novel challenges readers to consider other beauty standards and to cherish and honor every aspect of individuality since "[f]or bodies that are under threat from the gaze of the

city... to be seen is to feel the threat of having agency and autonomy stripped" (Ghan, 2020, para. 2).

This act of "passing" may be a strategy for self-preservation or a means of achieving a dream in the novel, yet it can have harmful effects on individuals and society as a whole, occurring when they experience a realization or a loss of hope about a previously held belief. In the novel, nevertheless, its harmful effects on individuals and communities can be seen by reinforcing harmful social norms, perpetuating discrimination, causing psychological distress, and creating a false sense of acceptance. The psychological damage of imposed beauty standards when Pecola "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, 1970, p. 97) delineates how such norms create a false sense of belonging. As a result, some characters seek to assume another identity, concealing their true selves and thereby experiencing disorientation, self-doubt, emotional suffering, and uncertainty about who they are.

2. THE DESIRE TO BELONG AND THE COST OF BECOMING

The Bluest Eye presents a haunting narrative that leaves a lasting impact on individuals and the community, evoking pain rather than joy. Morrison utilizes 'a mother figure' called Pauline Breedlove, but Pauline is groping in the dark about motherhood and "rejects the socially accepted notions of motherhood" (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2013, p. 478). Pauline adopts a different persona when working for the Fisher family, where she maintains a pristine home and presents herself as a competent and respectable woman. At home, however, she neglects her family, contributing to Pecola's feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. She "passes" into a more socially acceptable identity in white spaces while rejecting her own Black identity and responsibilities as a mother. Pauline's internalization of white beauty standards and seeing herself as ugly leads her to reject Pecola, who embodies the Blackness she has been conditioned to devalue. Pauline's emotional distance and neglect stem from her belief that whiteness is superior, making her "pass" into an identity where she aligns with whiteness at the expense of her own daughter. She, in other words, "passes" into a different kind of motherhood with the devotion of the Fisher child, in which she accepts white ideals more rather than embracing and supporting her own Black children.

Her passing is a sense of belonging and worth in this housekeeping role. Pauline's own difficult upbringing, including an abusive father and a traumatic injury, has left her emotionally scarred and unable to connect with her children. She is critical and unaffectionate towards Pecola, favoring her son and holding him to a higher standard than her daughter. Pauline's own internalized racism and desire to conform to oppressive beauty standards also cause her neglect of Pecola. The novel highlights the damaging effects of social beauty standards and the importance of nurturing, loving relationships between mothers and daughters. It is the same idea as Zerilli asserts in relation to Kristeva's thoughts on motherhood: "…the absence of mothers-as-speaking subjects that we are left with

nothing but a 'delusion,' albeit one with deadly consequences for women: the (mute) phallic mother and the (mute) loving mother of masculinist representation" (1992, p. 120). The absence of a supportive mother figure in Pecola's life results in her deep-seated insecurities and ultimate descent into madness. Further, for the connection between madness and blackness, Bruce explores, "[t]o be black in the thick of antiblack worlds is a condition of such trauma, such chaos, such strangeness, such wonder, such alterity, such uncertainty, such antagonism, that it often feels mad" (2020, p. 137). Pauline's sense of self, in this same vein, fractures under the pressure of white beauty standards and systemic racism.

Pauline illustrates how black women's self-image can be shaped and ultimately destroyed by a racist society. She is already vulnerable to the concept of beauty or discrimination. However, society imposes its parallel ideas of being black and being ugly on her so much that she eventually knuckles down to society by thinking as they evaluate them. She is a character who loses herself in search of her true self and has a great number of dreams about her life. Married to Cholly, some emotions awaken in her that she has never felt before. Cholly does not ignore her, making her feel special, secure, and grateful (Morrison, 1970, p. 92). Pauline wants a great family with a new beginning by going to the North with her husband; she covets the American Dream. However, this dream is unmatched by real life because going there means becoming more alienated.

Although she is familiar with the rejection of the white community and the repression by them, she is unfamiliar with the rejection of her own community, and she amplifies hatred for her own race "…Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like…That was the lonesomest time of my life" (Morrison, 1970, p. 93), so her unstable mind, formed by the devastating consequences of racism, is transmitted to melancholia deeply once more. She begins to oppose her own ethnicity, which fuels her desire to be one of the whites even more. Not only does Pauline accept it, but some other Black individuals also embrace the idea of assimilation, believing it may allow them to be accepted and to live successfully within a society that already treats them as the Other. After all, "[f]or not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon, 2009, p. 257). Concerning Fanon's concept of "the Other", the identities and colonized subjectivity are constructed in opposition to the colonizer. Acceptance of the white standards of beauty that dominate her world internalizes racial inferiority. The desire for assimilation mirrors Fanon's idea that the colonized, in this case, Pecola, constructs their identity based on the perceptions of the colonizer, white society, rather than from a sense of self.

Pauline explains her life as a disappointment since she "never felt at home anywhere" (p. 87). This feeling becomes the peak point in her life once she loses her tooth. She not only loses her tooth but also loses her belief in herself, which is becoming an accepted person in society as a beautiful woman. Even if she has the slightest glimmer of optimism, it vanishes, as well. Her melancholia never allows her to live her life properly, to be happy. Her new life becomes just a continuation of her old life, which makes her feel like someone else. Further, she is so alienated from her surroundings, herself, and her family that she

even wants her own children to die (Morrison, 1970, p. 89). Despite claiming ignorance regarding the cause of her disdain for her own children, her past experiences are obvious consequences of this urge to "beat them no matter what the problem is" (ibid., p. 100). After all, her children are black, and they cannot let her live the life she wants; also, they remind her of her own weakness. Although she contemplates that she is getting rid of her own ugliness by avoiding the mirrors, seeing her black children who look like her around her disappoints her even more. Nonetheless, there is not a single culprit in the novel, nor is there a single victim. In fact, Pauline is sacrificing herself, but she also sacrifices her daughter by choosing to resort to psychological violence instead of giving her the feeling of love. This character represents the unachieved demands, just like the protagonist, little Pecola. In other words, Pauline is the one who wants to achieve the American Dream the most, but she is never able to achieve it due to her surroundings, such as poverty, white people, and even the black ones in the North.

Morrison criticizes the expectation that everyone can "pass" into the American Dream through hard work, when in reality, racial and social barriers prevent Black families from accessing it. She elucidates the American Dream by using intertextuality as a technique to convey her message. She gives a story about Dick and Jane, but the reader understands that it is never achievable for each character since the author provides the story in a fragmented way, one by one. It is seen that there is no meaningful structure in the story as it progresses:

> Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappyseejaneshehasareddressshewantstoplaywhowillplaywithjaneseethecatitgoesmeowmeowcomeandplaycomeplaywithjanethekittenwillnotplayseemothermotherisverynicemotherwillyouplaywithjanemotherlaughslaughmotherlaughseefatherheisbigandstrongfatherwillyouplaywithjanefatherissmilingsmilefathersmileseethedogbowwowgoesthedogdoyouwanttoplaydoyouwanttoplaywithjaneseethedogrunrundogrunlooklookherecomesafriendthefriendwillplaywithjanetheywillplayagoodgameplayjaneplay. (Morrison, 1970, p. 3)

In fact, when the reader observes the passage when it is written in a normal way, they realize that is relevant to James Truslow Adams' American Dream definition in his book *The Epic of America*, "[l]ife should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (2001, p. 405). Dick and Jane's lives are better and fuller because there is a house with a nice and happy mother and a strong and wealthy father, and they even play games together. However, this ordered structure is rendered, cluttered, and almost unreadable on the first page by the author, who tries to show the reader that the truth is not the way people think and believe, that it is painful, and that the characters she creates cannot reach the American Dream, and this ultimately disappoints them. The use of the Dick-and-Jane primer as a framing device for the novel also reinforces this idea of white innocence and superiority. The simple language and images of the primer are presented as the ideal standard of learning, yet they are unrelatable and foreign to the black children in the novel. Unlike traditional racial passing,

Morrison demonstrates that Black individuals cannot pass into whiteness socially or economically because systemic racism keeps them from truly achieving the privileges of whiteness; therefore, with her narrative showing "social construction," "[r]acial passing is as much a political act as it is a personal act" (Bland, 2019, p. 56)

Pauline, thus, begins to think that her children will not live this American Dream which she cannot live and that they will experience the disappointments she has experienced because, according to society, the ideal concept of beauty and being powerful are always equal to being white such that she finds solace in her job as a housekeeper for a wealthy white family, where she can temporarily escape her own reality. Therefore, she pushes herself to think this way and starts to let her children, especially Pecola, experience the struggles that she has experienced painfully. The reader comes across a 'mother' who constantly belittles and criticizes her daughter due to her dark skin and plain features as evidence of her own inadequacy. Even if she thinks that she is smart, she cannot admit that blacks are beautiful, which is a thought put into her head by both her own and the other race:

> Pecola look like she knowed right off what to. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her. You know they makes them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly (Morrison, 1970, p. 102).

While trying to be contented at first, thinking that she can find love and continue her life with her family happily, Pauline experiences a metamorphosis that leads her to agonize about her own life and the way she has been treated by others. She seems to take no pleasure in their company in her journey, dragging her to hate her own existence, being distant from her children, taking out her frustrations on her family, and reflecting this pain to Pecola. Thus, their disillusionment becomes parallel. Her mother longs for beauty and love, but they become lost objects, which leads her to depression as she cannot achieve them. As an "unsophisticated black spectator" (Stewart, 1970, p. 655), Pauline, "who uncritically enjoy[s] Hollywood cinema despite the illusionist incongruity with the 'realities' of their black lives" (ibid.), reinforces her belief that whiteness is beautiful and desirable. She thus passes into a version of herself that fits the imagined world, seeing it as an escape from the pain and struggles of her Black reality. It reflects how passing is not always about appearance but also about adopting attitudes and behaviors that affiliate with dominant cultural norms.

Pecola, on the other hand, is a little girl who is mistreated by her family and bullied by the other children around her. These troubles create a new Pecola, driven to madness. She is dehumanized not only by her family but also by society. In other words, as Neal and Collas put it, she becomes an alienated person with "the feeling of being segregated from one's community" (2000, p. 114). Passing, in this perspective, involves separating oneself from one's true identity to fit into an oppressive system. Pecola, however, fails to pass in any form, leaving her completely isolated from both black and white communities. She is

tormented by some black boys with "ignorance, self-hatred and hopelessness" (Morrison, 1970, p. 53) because of her dark skin even though they are just the same. By doing this, they just want to underestimate their blackness through Pecola. The issue of colorism has damaging effects that cause people to have depression and self-hatred, confronting their own prejudices and biases, as everyone believes that having lighter skin and Eurocentric features will make them more beautiful and accepted in society. She, in a way, does not attempt to physically pass as white, but she desires blue eyes, believing that possessing white features will make her loved and accepted. No matter how much she wishes for blue eyes, however, she can never truly achieve the acceptance she longs for, as a "failure of the passing endeavor [that] leads to devastating consequences" (Kucik, 2019, p. 165).

In one of her 2012 essays, author Marita Golden writes that "I have begun more and more to conclude that colorism is the most unacknowledged and unaddressed mental-health crisis in communities of color around the world," depicting "colorism" is an unhealthy condition that is the discriminatory treatment of individuals, and it happens even among children who actually should not be thinking about such discrimination. Maureen Peal, who is described as having "high-yellow" skin and "good hair" (Morrison, 1970, p. 50), is another manifestation of colorism in the novel. She is approached with great warmth and respect by the other kids in their school. Even though she does not represent some of the facts of the perception of beauty in society's regard, such as a "dog tooth" on her upper jaw and "sloe eyes," her black classmates are too enslaved by her white traits to notice these flaws. Conversely, her "whiteness" is admired and coveted, which shows that being black is the biggest flaw according to them. This colorism issue is so deeply ingrained in them that she, despite being just a kid, believes she has superiority over others and can treat them with brutality, so she thinks that she has the right to exclaim herself as "cute" and the black ones are "ugly emos" (Morrison, 1970, p. 59). Similarly, a light-skinned black woman's son, Louis Junior, represents colorism as well as classism. Pecola and her family live in poverty, which is a repellent matter for the American Dream, whereas the Geraldine family lives in wealth. Louis Junior suffers from colorism, while he treats black people as his mother wishes because his mother "did not like niggers and wants him to play with white ones" (p. 70), he becomes lonely subsequently, as well. Morrison sheds light on its displacement onto children to show the timeless and cyclical nature of colorism.

Once Geraldine's son throws a black cat at Pecola's face, which symbolizes the predatory nature of white society and how it preys upon black individuals, the evolution of bonds between human and nonhuman becomes constructed. The cat is welcomed by her, and she is welcomed by the cat. Despite his abnormal act, they are frightened by him, leading them to create an unusual friendship. However, when he kills the cat, Pecola becomes dead, as well, which is a significant turning point in the metamorphosis of Pecola, shattering her wish of being able to develop a healthy friendship and not feel alone. The use of the bird metaphor in the novel is also associated with Pecola being fragile and vulnerable, like the image of a helpless bird. Moreover, the recurring depictions of birds being trapped or harmed symbolize the oppression and violence endured by Pecola. In her quest for blue

eyes, she visits a location where she believes she can exchange her own eyes for blue ones. Her desire for blue eyes is compared to a bird's desire to fly, highlighting the unattainable nature of her desire to become. However, she is deceived by Soaphead Church, who promises her blue eyes in exchange for feeding the dog. Pecola, nonetheless, discovers that she has poisoned the dog and witnesses its anguish as it struggles and dies. Soaphead's sadistic impulses and desire to manipulate and subjugate Pecola are expressed in this action. As a man of mixed ancestry, Soaphead himself shows contempt for Black people with his own form of rejection of Blackness.

Morrison explains that Soaphead's own forebears "believed [their academic accomplishments] was based on" their mixed blood. A decaying British nobleman had "introduced the white strain into the family" (1970, p. 130), and his wife learned "to separate herself in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa; to cultivate the habits, tastes, preferences that her absent father-in-law and foolish mother-in-law would have approved" (ibid.). The abuse Pecola experiences destroys her purity and fragility, which is represented by the animals as well. The famous American psychologist William James' 'Quantum Change Theory', which refers to a "dramatic, and enduring transformation that affects a broad range of personal emotion, cognition, and behavior…" (Miller, 2004, p. 453), describes the changes in the characters, for which they are influenced by the external and internal factors dramatically, and with the devastating consequences of personal emotion, cognition, and behavior. The novel empowers the concept of passing and its consequences through Soaphead Church at the end of the novel:

> We in this colony took as our own the most dramatic, and the most obvious, of our white masters' characteristics, which were, of course, their worst. In retaining the identity of our race, we held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and least troublesome to maintain. (Morrison, 1970, p. 177)

The dog, like the earlier incident with the cat, symbolizes Pecola's development, as her realization of what she has done, 'covering her mouth in fear' (ibid., p. 148), signifies the final moment in which the reader perceives her as a sane girl. The next day, she creates a friend in her mind, which makes her believe she has blue eyes. She internalizes the social message that whiteness and blue eyes are the epitome of beauty, and she feels inferior because of her dark skin and brown eyes, which make her feel increasingly isolated and delusional. Her fixation on having blue eyes constitutes a metaphor for how Black people absorb the idea that White people are superior to them and that White beauty standards are the only legitimate ones. The damage that these beliefs can inflict can be seen in Pecola's mental collapse. Therefore, her dream is fulfilled by disillusionment, which causes her change to be completed with madness. The systemic violence and psychological destruction, in other words, prevent her from ever "passing" into a world where she is valued.

In another situation, Pecola's other dream is to have healthy familial models who do not make her feel like an outsider, protect her, and stay by her side. In other words, her dream

is to have Claudia's parents, who never ignore their daughter, who are loving and caring, unlike the Breedloves. Thanks to this strong family representation, Claudia is not affected by the negative impacts of society's ideas about their race completely, embracing her own natural beauty. According to her, white people are not representatives of the idea of beauty, so she "destroys white dolls" (Morrison, 1970, p. 16), which are given to her as Christmas gifts by her family. It shows the reader that her family thinks as society thinks about the idealized image of beauty and shows its harm to those who do not fit the mold. Her ability to destroy them represents her refusal to conform or "pass" into whiteness, preserving her self-worth. Even her cat represents her independence and rebellion against social expectations, as she refuses to conform to the idealized image of a young black girl. The cat's ability to escape and resist confinement is symbolic of Claudia's own desire for freedom.

Although Pecola and Claudia both struggle with the pressures of idealized beauty, Pecola loses her sense of self in an attempt to conform to society's standards, whereas Claudia resists them, developing her own sense of identity. Nonetheless, this ideal remains a source of disillusionment for both girls; at least Claudia's family protects her from the full trauma, even though society has already damaged Black children's sense of self. Unlike them, due to Pecola's mother's ongoing emotional issues and her absent father, Pecola feels abandoned and unwanted in her fractured home. Her lack of parental support makes her yearn for other people's endorsement and acknowledgment, fueling her craving for blue eyes, which she thinks will make her attractive and adored. Considering that Claudia's parents are so supportive and have a dream family, Pecola feels surrounded by unfulfilled hopes, shattered expectations, and the realization that their idealized vision of life is not attainable.

On the other hand, the depressed parents of Pecola create a depressed child in the end. She has been forced to face mental trauma by her parents, who have already experienced trauma in their past. His mom has not raised Cholly since she relinquished him, causing him to experience a lack of love, which leads him to have no idea about raising a child. Cholly, additionally, has been exposed to a traumatic, dramatic, and shameful event when two white men push him and his partner, Darlene, to fornicate before them. Cholly is humiliated in a way he has never experienced before, which brings out the feelings in him that make him want to hate himself. When the author conveys the ideas in his mind, which are full of hatred for Darlene, the emotion is displayed perfectly. He wants to do it "painfully, hard and long" (Morrison, 1970, p. 121) for a short time, so he can show his strength to those white men, and this thought makes him want to hate everyone there. In fact, he has seen himself and his humiliation through Darlene, which drags him to feel inferior, creating a harmful cycle that is difficult to break. Thus, this self-hatred has a huge impact on his love for others. Like many others, he is slowly losing his faith in life due to past traumas, the lack of love from his wife, and society's relegation of him and his family to the background. Finally, he commits an unacceptable mistake, a sin, by becoming "dangerously free" (ibid., p. 132), and maltreatment overwhelming Pecola occurs which is defined as "[t]he rape, and

in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children" by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Goldman, 2003, p. 14). Thus, Pecola is becoming a victim of the sickening rape issue, and Cholly destroys the positive emotions of this little girl, who is already broken. In addition to the devastating impact of this sexual violence on her psyche, her community blames and shames her for the abuse she has suffered.

Cholly's trauma is a "response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event that is not fully grasped as it occurs but returns later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, or other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, p.91) since it leads him to feel inferior and trapped in a cycle of shame. However, Cholly's trauma is not only personal but also collective, representative of a society that continuously oppresses black individuals, leaving them feeling disconnected from their true selves. Instead of passing into a better life, he attempts to assert his strength through destructive actions, projecting his anger and hatred onto those closest to him. His inability to break free from his trauma and the racism he experienced leaves him incapable of showing love and respect or creating a stable home for Pecola. He has already been alienated due to prior events; however, his destructive behavior towards his own family makes Pecola more alienated from the world.

The rape and the emotional violence Pecola experiences, therefore, display how her sense of self is destroyed by the weight of her family's trauma and social expectations. Passing, in Pecola's case, is tied not to a physical change but to a deep psychological transformation in which she believes she must reject herself entirely to fit the mold of what society defines as beautiful. The community also plays a role in this cycle by blaming and shaming her for the abuse she suffers. Bhabha argues that colonized people often unknowingly help maintain the very system that oppresses them by internalizing the dominant culture's values, making the powerful one even stronger and harder to undo (Godiwala, 2007, pp. 62-63). This powerful victim-blaming reflects the rejection of the Black identity and worth. The failure of the community to support Pecola connects the impossibility of "achieving" acceptance through passing. The cycle of hatred and degradation shows how passing, whether through conforming to white expectations or attempting to meet idealized notions of family, becomes impossible for those deeply scarred by trauma. Pecola's experience is a direct consequence of this inability to pass into a healthy and loving family structure.

As a result, Pecola drifts into silence, for although she speaks, she believes no one will listen, and she is unsure of what to say. This silence also changes her because every time she cannot talk, she loses her mind traumatically, and she "displays her melancholy through silence" (Smoak, 2017, p. 22). This episode of melancholy helps her overcome the oppressive power of the world because the more she keeps quiet, the more she closes herself against the world that is already hell for her. After Pecola is raped and impregnated by her own father, she wants to replace this depression with happiness which is only ensured by "passing" to the beauty that is equal to having 'blue eyes' according to her little world. She becomes obsessed with those eyes, believing they reduce her depression. Keeping silent is a way for her to avoid confronting these uncomfortable and painful realities, indicating a

reluctance to engage in difficult and corrosive discussions. Not only Pecola but also those around her remain silent about this debilitating event when "silence finally witnesses to a traumatized history in which memories of rape were to remain unspoken, and indeed unsayable, lest they prevent black women from passing into true womanhood" (Knadler, 2003, p. 92). These harsh realities shed light on the damaging effects of social prejudices. By choosing to keep silent about Pecola, the community avoids the discomfort of acknowledging these systemic issues and its own potential complicity in them.

The act of passing, therefore, strengthens the idea that being a member of a certain group that is undesirable or inferior leads to internalized oppression, where individuals begin to believe that their own group is inferior and feel ashamed of their true identity. Therefore, individuals may feel that they need to distance themselves from their true community to avoid being discovered. The profound harm of masking true identity, and the community's complicity in that harm, is captured in the girls' own words: "We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness… we honed our egos on her" (Morrison, 1970, p. 162), revealing both the stupefaction inflicted on Pecola and the diffidence and grief it engenders in those who hide behind false selves. Passing can be seen as a form of deception. It can ultimately raise ethical concerns about honesty and authenticity. In the manner of betrayal to one's own identity and community, passing can cause resentment and mistrust between different groups, triggering feelings of guilt, shame, and disconnection from one's own identity and community. It leads, in the end, the characters to feel incomplete as subjects. It can also create a constant fear of being "found out" and ostracized if one's identity is revealed. While it is important to promote acceptance and celebrate diversity instead of pressuring individuals to conform to dominant social norms, the characters do not accept this diversity.

3. CONCLUSION

Morrison, whose characters fluctuate in numerous ways throughout the entire story, employs the concept of passing as a metaphor for the characters' psychological and emotional states. Pauline passes from a youthful, hopeful woman to a bitter and disgruntled domestic servant who is quite dissatisfied with her life. Cholly, as a victim of trauma and racial humiliation, passes from a young guy who yearns for love and connection to an aggressive and harassing alcoholic. Pecola faces an unfortunate transition as she starts to internalize the bigotry and self-hatred she encounters in her town, and she starts to feel that her dark skin and unappealing characteristics make her undeserving of affection and consideration. She, like many characters in the novel, believes that conforming to white beauty standards will grant her love, acceptance, and worth. However, her tragic fate demonstrates that passing into whiteness is just an illusion rather than a true escape. The racism, colorism, and self-hatred imposed by society make it impossible for them to be accepted. Unlike Claudia, who is shielded by a supportive family, Pecola is abandoned, neglected, and ultimately destroyed by those who should have protected her.

The Black community, instead of helping Pecola, depicts the oppressive standards that crush her, showing how marginalized groups can uphold the very systems that harm them. Therefore, her ultimate destruction is not only the result of her father's actions but also the failure of her community and family to protect her. "Passing," in *The Bluest Eye*, thus, is not just about physical appearance; it is also about the desire to belong in a world that refuses to recognize Blackness as beautiful or worthy. For the characters, failing to pass means total erasure. They descend into madness, symbolizing the ultimate cost of internalized racism and social rejection. Morrison, therefore, manages to display the idea of passing in every way with the characters whose dreams turn into disillusionment, depicting the destructive repercussions of institutional racism and cultural beauty standards on individuals and communities. The novel, thus, exposes the dangerous effects of white beauty standards and the social rejection of Blackness, entailing rejecting persuasive cultural norms and redefining what self-worth, self-acceptance, and beauty are. The desire to pass, then, becomes inevitable due to oppression and marginalization, the wish to gain social advantage, and the fluidity of their identities. However, its consequences prompt the reader to confront the disillusionment that arises from a society that perpetuates inequality and encourages them to work towards a more inclusive and accepting world.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

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