

Treatment of the Theme of Child Abuse in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

*Child abuse is a theme that demands serious critical reflection. Authors dealing with it in fictions are few in number. Toni Morrison is one of them. Her ground-breaking novel *The Bluest Eye* deals with issues of racial prejudice, cultural hegemony, child abuse, and so on. The paper explores the various forms of child abuse in Toni Morrison's classic *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison's delineation of child abuse in this novel deserves a careful study because it is thematically linked with different issues of the text, such as racism, concept of beauty, self-identity, and alienation. The principal forms of child abuse delineated in this novel include verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse. The study analyzes them critically and discusses the effects of the abuses on the victims. Finally, the study brings into view the children's view of the adult world.*

Keywords: Child abuse, racial prejudice, cultural hegemony, verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, the adult world

I

Alex Haley began the story of slavery in *Roots* with Kunta Kinte who was sent to Alex Annapolis in the British colony of Maryland in 1767 and sold in an auction in Virginia. Since then, the story of the African Americans has crossed many hurdles: from the 13th amendment act, prohibiting slavery; reconstruction; coping with the Ku Klux Klan; the 15th amendment act of the constitution that gave blacks the right to vote; and Jim Crow's segregation act in the South. The stock market crash in 1929 brought about The Great Depression of 1929-1941, and the lives of the already poor African Americans were made much worse. Overt racism was rampant and black workers were normally the first to lose jobs at a business or on a farm and often denied public work. With unemployment escalating, jobs previously considered "Negro occupations" suddenly became attractive to the larger, white population. These jobs included domestic help, elevator operators, street cleaners, garbage collectors, waiters, and bellhops. Blacks were considered fit for only the low-paying, dirty jobs. In Atlanta the slogan "No Jobs for Niggers Until Every White Man Has a Job" or "Last Hired, First Fired" became popular among the Whites. Blacks faced yet another obstacle during the Great Depression. With husbands unemployed or taking pay cuts, the incomes of their wives became much more critical. But with hard times for everyone, many white women began seeking jobs for the first time. They also took jobs traditionally held by black women such as maids, housekeepers, and cooks. All these facts and issues set the backdrop of the literature of this time. Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* belongs to this category which portrays the present scenario of the Black people in Lorain, Ohio in 1941, the Rural South in the

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Early 20th Century after the Great Depression. The poor-living conditions of the Black community, their frustration of unemployment, their self-loathing attitude, their struggle for survival invoke the multi-dimensional forms of abuses which will be focused on this paper. The Black community's position in society is clearly reflected in the following quote from *The Bluest Eye*: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with—probably because it was abstract" (Morrison 11).

II

The Bluest Eye speaks about "a little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes" (Morrison 138). It is written as a fragmented narrative from multiple perspectives so that we can interpret the text through the voices of Claudia, Frieda, Pecola, Soaphead Church, the third person omniscient narrator, and the authors' voice herself. However, the focus of the research on different forms of abuse will be interpreted through the eyes of the young children in the novel. The story centers around two black African families, McTeer family and the Breedlove family with different ethics and values in life and both living in the hideous conditions. Mr. and Mrs. McTeer have two daughters, Claudia who is ten and Frieda who is nine. Their house is "old, cold and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room" (Morrison 5). The McTeer family rented out a room to a border, Henry Washington. On the other hand, we have the Breedlove family where love is no longer found to be an unifying force. Cholly and Pauline Breedlove ironically had little love to give Pecola and their son Sammy. The Breedlove's lived in extreme poverty as well with just the bare needs of survival. This miserable state is described, "The bedroom had three beds: a narrow iron bed for Sammy, fourteen years old, another for Pecola, eleven years old, and a double bed for Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove. In the center of the bedroom, for the even distribution of heat, stood a coal stove . . . There were no bath facilities. As we are told, there is only "a toilet bowl, inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear, of the tenants" (25). In that room, there was a sofa which was split straight across the back before it was delivered. They lived in the store front "because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly" (28). And their ugliness was "unique" (28).

Constant child abuse have different impacts on the children. In Claudia's case, it turns her into a violent child whereas it made Pecola a naïve child. The first sign of the Claudia's defiance becomes noticeable when she states "Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy.... I cough once., my mother frowns" (Morrison 5). Claudia feels sick and says, "No one speaks to me or asks how I feel" and when she vomits, Mrs. Breedlove says "Now, look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?" (6). The child feels dejected and scared to call back her mother, "My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying" (8). The children normally want attention of the adults; they are looking for warmth and love which the adults seem incapable of

providing. Claudia promises never to show her weak self again in the future. When the girls are introduced to Henry Washington, Claudia observes "Frieda and I were not introduced to him--merely pointed out" (10). A girl of ten is still very sensitive, and Claudia attempts to structure the self. This unconscious negligence is an indirect mental abuse.

The family violence of the inconsiderate parents can create disintegration in family bonding. This is shown when Pecola's father Cholly, an alcoholic, had burnt their house and they were now "outdoors" (11). He had mentally abused the children and destabilized his family structure. The McTeer family looked after Pecola while Sammy lived with another family and Mrs. Breedlove stayed at the Fisher's house where she was employed as a housekeeper. One could see here how racial frustration and cultural hegemony affect family relationships. This shows a black family's inability to provide security to their children unlike the picture-perfect family image set by the Dick-Jane narrative represented in the "prologue." Pecola lacks the warmth and stability in her home. Pauline Breedlove is unable to nurture feelings of self-worth in her daughter. She herself is dissatisfied with the role of motherhood. For her, the experience of motherhood is a mixture of maternal rage and maternal regret. Cholly, an alcoholic, is unable to give any affection to Pecola. Both Cholly and Pauline fight all day and are incapable of giving love and instilling a sense of self-respect in their children. "He fought her the way a coward fights a man—with feet, the palms of his hands, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way—with frying pans and pokers, and occasionally a flat iron" (Morrison 32). These fights were regular and gave Pauline substance to her life, for she was the Christian protecting her family. But these fights and the physical, verbal, and emotional abuses traumatized the children who began to believe that they had a broken family. Sammy had already left the house twenty seven times. Pecola was too scared to move from the horrific scene as the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. She would feel nausea, that feeling of alienation that there was no one there to help her if anyone died. Out of severe agony, she muttered, "Please, God" (33), and then she whispered "Please make me disappear" (33). And, as Sammy gives the Oedipal cry to protect his mother and says "Kill him! Kill him!" (33), she then acknowledges that she was destined to be in this broken family because she was ugly and she belonged to this family.

Morrison provides us a little background of Cholly's life to help us understand how abused children turn into abusive parents. Cholly Breedlove was abandoned by his mother when he was four days old. Cholly was humiliated as a young lad at the hands of the white man who surprised him in his love-making with Darlene and who forced him to proceed the act with a torch light on his face. It had an abiding negative impact on Cholly's psychology and behavior. Another abusive experience in his life was the attempt to find his father. When Aunt Jimmy died, Cholly decided to go to Macon in search of his father, Samson Fuller. When he was asked by his father whether he was Melba's Boy, Cholly realized that his mother's name was unknown to him. Sammy Fullers' priority was clear, his crap game was more important than his reunion with his lost son "Tell that bitch she get her money. Now, get the fuck outta my face!" (Morrison 123). This young lad, barely sixteen, was rejected by his father and became imbued with a new feeling in life "Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, shame, love, grief,

pity... He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die,” (26). This gave him a psychological scar which ultimately led to the fatal rape of his daughter, Pecola.

The novel also sheds some light on Pauline’s psychological state which helps us understand her love for a fight with Cholly and her abusive attitude towards her own child. Pauline was not eager for the role of motherhood because she had seen how in her mother’s life, it had brought only more work and no gratification. Cholly’s tenderness towards her during her pregnancy filled her with expectations, but she realized that it brought about only loneliness. So she escaped into a world of fantasy and experienced vicarious pleasure in identification with white women in the movies. “There I was, five month pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone” (Morrison 96). Thus, she wanted to be someone else. In spite of her bitter dissatisfaction with motherhood with her first child, Pauline once again became pregnant. But her experience at the labor ward in the charity hospital is bitter and the white doctor comments “They deliver right away with no pain. Just like horses” (97). She feels inadequate and disappointed in life and clings to a wounded psyche; her anger was vented on Pecola who became the tragic victim of her parent’s disillusionment in life.

III

In “The Alienated Self: Searching for Space in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*” anthologized in *Modern American Literature*, the critics Swine and Das observe that “this novel probes deeper into the black woman’s psychic dilemmas, oppressions and tribulations as symbolized by the tragic life of Pecola literally affected by the dominant culture’s beauty standards” (89). Pecola, like her mother, equated beauty with white standard. Both are haunted by this inferiority complex and self-hatred. Cultural hegemony distorts the true nature of values so that it dominates the subordinate class to believe that they are inferior and the dominating class is the superior; as such, here white is believed to symbolize beauty and black is to symbolize ugliness. Pecola stands for binary opposition ugliness, unworthiness, invisibility and lack of self-esteem. In fact, Pecola prays to have blue eyes so that she could be considered beautiful. Since being white is associated with aesthetics, moral superiority, and power, those who are less black and more socially recognized will therefore have more power. We also find that this cultural hegemony has influenced society as such that an internal conflict has infiltrated the black community.

It must be mentioned that the black African-Americans have been white washed. A light skinned black is superior to a black American, the lighter the skin, the more the respect. One could notice in the case of Maureen Peel who had many friends and was loved by her teachers. However, Pecola is obsessed with the idea that a combination of white skin and blue eyes is beautiful to the extent that she went overboard drinking ‘three quarts of milk!’ (16) which annoyed Mrs. McTeer. What is interesting is that she drank from a cup which had the beautiful picture of Shirley Temple, a child actress of her time. Mrs. Breedlove got angry and verbally abused Pecola; Frieda and Claudia were “...Ashamed of the insults that were being heaped on our friend, we just sat there... extremely painful in their thrust”(16) Morrison says, “She would go on like that for hours, connecting one offense to another until all of the things that chagrined her were spewed

out" (16). Pecola drank so much milk because just like the Mary Jane candies, she could identify with and be Shirley Temple.

In fact, everyone accepted that white was beauty but only a sensitive child-like Claudia held opposed views on this unquestioned white supremacy. Morrison states, "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured." But we find an opposing reaction from Claudia, "Here," they (adults) said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it" (Morrison 14). Claudia hated her doll and tore it to pieces. She preferred Jane Withers to Shirley Temple. She hated the idea that Shirley Temple had danced with black Bojangles whom Claudia called "My Uncle, my daddy" (12) in her films—a true rebellion at heart. But grown-ups frowned and fussed over the broken white dolls that she had mutilated out of hatred and out of defiance against society—her mind was a blank slate of innocence, somehow untouched by social norms and the patriarchal values of white America. It is in this white world where Pecola symbolizes all non-white ugliness. The whole world is out there to make her feel guilty for being black and ugly. She is ill treated by her family, friends, classmates, teachers, even the shopkeepers. Pecola buys Mary Jane candies from racist Mr. Yacobowski at the grocery store for only three pennies. The shopkeeper looks at her physically, but to him she existentially does not exist. This is the fatal white hegemony which distorts Black psychology. "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" (36). This degrading behavior and avoidance of touch act as a kind of mental abuse and anger as stated "There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging" (37-38). She feels shame because of this "vacuum edged" created by this blackness—tears conjured inside her—her only outlet is to fantasize on the Mary Jane candies. "To Pecola they are simply pretty. 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" (38).

IV

The impact of all these humiliation, negligence and violence tend to distort Pecola's psychology to the extent where she also starts to believe that only the bluest eyes can give her worth. Pecola looked at herself in the mirror trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her invisible and despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only student in her class who sat alone at a double desk. Her teachers never noticed her and only called on her when required. If any girl wanted to insult a boy or wanted to get attention she could say, "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!" and never fail to get peals of laughter as she is faced with neglect and emotional abuse.

Pecola was so obsessed with the idea of having blue eyes that she went to a fake light skinned spiritualist-Soaphead Church to request him to give her blue eyes. It was then that Soaphead Church decided to blackmail Pecola by poisoning his dog and its cruel death would craft her fate. In fact he exploited her naïve nature and took advantage of her innocence, "Here was an ugly

little girl asking for beauty . . . A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. . . She was just a little girl who wanted blue eyes” (138). Soaphead Church confessed in his letter to God that he was a misanthropist by nature—“Let me tell you now about the breasts of little girls. I apologize for the inappropriateness (is that it?), the imbalance of loving them at awkward times of day, and in awkward places” (141). He molested and sexually abused little girls; and he nonchalantly said it was in his nature to do so “I am Yam What I Yam?” (143).

Similarly, it was discovered that Mr. Henry Washington had molested and abused Frieda when she was alone in the house. Both Mr. and Mrs. McTeer reacted with utmost rage and stood up in defiance at Henry Washington’s unacceptable behavior. Mrs. McTeer hit him with a broom stick, and Mr. McTeer shouted at him. In Frieda’s words, “Daddy shot at him and Mr. Henry jumped out of his shoes and kept on running in his socks. Then Rosemary came out and said that Daddy was going to jail, and I hit her” (77), which showed that the MacTeers had more concern and responsibility as guardians than the Breedloves.

The impact of abuse on a child can also be observed in the scene when Pecola first had her puberty. Pecola menstruated in the garden while playing with Frieda and Claudia and had no idea of what happened to her, she thought that she would die. Frieda explained that she was now capable of having a baby. While the sisters tried to help and clean Pecola—they were confronted with the nosey neighbor Rosemary who threatened to tell Mrs. Macteer that the girls were “playing nasty” (Morrison 22). Claudia the rebel reached out and scratched Rosemary’s nose. Mrs. MacTeer broke off a branch from a nearby bush and started physically and verbally abusing Frieda, and at one stage she said that she would have preferred pigs rather than her because at least she could slaughter the pigs. Being abused, “Frieda was destroyed. Whippings wounded and insulted her” (22). As the girls slept that night Pecola asks if she could now have a baby and Frieda ironically says “Somebody has to love you” (23).

Another instance of physical violence is seen when Pecola visits her mother with Frieda and Claudia at the Fishers household where her mother worked. The little girl she looked after called Pauline Breedlove Polly, whilst her daughter Pecola called her Mrs. Breedlove. This annoys Claudia to the extent that she feels like scratching the little white child the way she tore the white doll apart. When Pecola drops the hot berry cobbler accidentally on the floor Pauline’s reaction was abusive. “In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication. Crazy fool” (Morrison 84). When Pecola was putting the laundry bag in the wagon, Mrs. Breedlove was soothing and comforting the little pink-and-yellow girl instead of her own daughter. Here Pecola was abused verbally, physically, and psychologically. Pauline Breedlove had no sympathy for her own daughter who was burnt but showed affection for the Fisher’s white girl. Pauline Breedlove’s cold act further conforms to Pecola’s sense of ugliness and dejection. There is a distortion in the natural self of Pauline because she exchanges her role of an ideal mother with that of an ideal maid. Wade-Gayles observe that, “Pauline rejects her own daughter because she has erased from her psyche the line separating reality from illusion,

mammyhood from motherhood" (qtd. In Badode 90). Into her son, Sammy, Pauline beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beats a fear of growing up, fear of other people, and a fear of life.

Morrison also draws our attention to the various phases of discrimination that exist among people of colours. For instance a person with lighter skin is always privileged over the person who is not so. Such was a privileged light-skinned girl Maureen Peel who was the most popular green eyed girl at school adored by teachers and other students. She protected Pecola from a group of bullies who were verbally abusive towards her. Frieda and Claudia felt the discomfort in her presence. However, they discovered that she had six fingers and a dog tooth which comforted them and in a quarrel Maureen Peel deepens her sense of worthlessness, as when Maureen Peel, a white girl, says, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black emos. I am cute!" (Morrison 56). Claudia challenges the statement and wonders that if Maureen was cute, then where would they be on the scale, "Nicer, brighter but still lesser" than she. This emotionally bruised Claudia who rebelliously argues, "Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peels of the world" (Morrison 57). Claudia, on behalf of all the abused children, throws some questions to the world: "What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what?" (57). Yet she asserts her self-esteem by saying, "guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness" (57) Claudia confesses, "Jealousy we understood and thought natural—a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us. And all the time we knew that Maureen Peel was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us" (58). This is what cultural hegemony has cultivated in society, the version of the superior dominant white over inferior black.

In addition, Geraldine was a mulatto, a pseudo-perfectionist with a perfect home. She looked after Louis Junior without the talk, the pampering and the love. "It was, however, not long before he discovered the difference in his mother's behavior to himself and the cat. And as he grew older, he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, even to the point of gleefully watching it suffer" (Morrison 67). His mother didn't like him mixing with the black community because the light skinned colour gave the mulattos an advantage, "Colored people were considered neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (67). He was lonely and always wanted other kids around him in the playground. He was spoilt, bullied girls and threw gravel at the other kids. One day he met Pecola and even though he thought her "ugly" he invited her to the house to see a kitten and suddenly "he threw a big black cat at her, which clawed on to her face and chest and as she moved away, Louis Junior said "You can't get out. You're my prisoner" (70). He then started swinging the black cat with the blue green eyes until he threw it behind the radiator. Pecola did try to stop this but her dress got ripped and all her efforts were in vain. Of course, Geraldine came in to see her untidy house and found Pecola the culprit, and her innocent son in a disordered state under the same roof "You nasty little black bitch get out of my house" (72). And Pecola left,

disgraced, physically and mentally abused. She had lost, society had won, her only escape would be to have blue eyes. “She was not without hope...Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” (35).

Morrison seems to prepare the readers to reach the expected climax of the story through Cholly’s rape scene which had already been introduced in the prologue as she synchronizes with nature the audacious deed “*We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair... all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth*” (Morrison 4). Cholly Breedlove was dead, so was the baby and with that the innocence of a child. Morrison wants us to look closely at Cholly’s psychological state when he raped his daughter. We are informed that Cholly was drunk in the rape scene. It was one of two instance of a sexual abuse-where Pecola’s “tucked-in look of the scratching toe” (Morrison 127) fused with the hallucinating image of Pauline Breedlove’s similar act in Kentucky, he felt a mixture of hatred and tenderness towards the little girl . Cholly’s body language said it all, “He crawls in all fours and raises his hands . . . a surge of emotions go through him “revulsion, guilt, pity and then love . . . What could he do for her-ever? What give her . . . What could a burnt-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter?” (127).

If we look back at Cholly’s abused childhood and adolescence we will be able to understand the reasons behind his final fatal action, “Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose....” (Morrison 126). This could be the most dangerous stage in a growing boy’s life when “He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die, the how and the when of which held no interest for him” (126). In those days, Cholly Breedlove was truly free and reckless. He hardly understood relationships and family as he had only an old Aunt Jimmy whom he deplored. He had no family as he was rejected as a child and just lived for the moment-Carpe Dieme.

Finally, we are informed that Pecola fainted after the rape. She had become pregnant, but there was a chance the baby may never see the light of day because Mrs Breedlove frequently abused her. Mrs Breedlove herself a physically abused victim punished Pecola for her quenched sympathy. But Pecola won the day-all the verbal, emotional and physical abuses pushed her outside reality, in an oblivion where no one was able to reach her and in her madness she cherished her blue eyes “Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again” (159).

V

This part of the paper comments on the four principal forms of child abuse delineated by Tony Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*. These different forms of child abuse deeply affect the victims who are traumatized. Indeed, their subjectivity is considerably transformed by these abuses which shape their perception of the adult world. The experiences that they have undergone alienate

them from society and from themselves as well. In Toni Morrison's novel, the theme of child abuse is, thus, ultimately linked with the great theme of alienation. In fact, Morrison deals with the traumatic alienation of the children through different types of child abuse in *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison also depicts psychological violence in her narrative world. As we see, Pecola is injured psychologically by almost every one she comes across. Her mother does not trust her, her father rapes her, her brother does not take her with him, her class mates make fun of her, a shopkeeper chooses to ignore her, her best friends, Claudia and Frieda, also eventually start avoiding her. Pecola believes that she is lost in a world of double discrimination of both race and sex—as someone who is both black and a young female. She has moved to a world of fantasy and imagination, a world of insanity where her alter ego exists. In this world, she clings onto her dream that all her miseries would depart and she would be loved by her family, friends, the racist candy man, the mulattos, and the fake spiritualist only if she had blue eyes.

We see lecherous characters like Henry Washington, Soaphead Church, and Cholly—sexually abusing little girls—all dirty-minded—all dirty middle aged men with no ethical character or moral values. But although one felt that the author wanted sympathy from the readers—the distorted love given to the little girl destroyed what little self-esteem she had which ultimately led to her destruction. It is only Claudia who had the psychic resilience to recompose herself persistently and redefine her identity.

Black characters in Toni Morrison's novel are often scarred—physically and/or emotionally—by the oppressive environments around them. Racially exploited, sexually violated, and often emotionally humiliated for years or decades, characters such as Cholly—Pauline Breedlove and Pecola often learn to coexist with their visible and invisible scars by making choices that are not easily understood. Specifically, many of Morrison's characters turn to violence—sometimes verbal but more frequently physical abuse. Consequently, mistreatment is redirected toward others—often children—within the family. While painful to absorb, this redirection can also be seen as a didactic teaching—an instinctive message teaching black children to cope with the mechanisms within a world that denies and exploits their self-worth.

Abuses are the end products of hundreds of years of disruption of the multifaceted oppression. Black Africans have suffered within a white patriarchal society where black women and children are tormented and living under unfavorable conditions and subjugated by social and racial domination. The end product of such social exclusion is social defiance—standing up to the rights of appreciating the self—as Claudia retaliates against the norms of her society's cultural hegemony by white men's values, ethics, and norms. She violates the societal expectations by tearing up the white dolls with golden hair and blue eyes; by scratching the white nosy neighbor, Rosemary Villanucci; by challenging the great Maureen Peal; by promising never to get sick because her mother thought she was too weak; by analyzing the grownups and expressing her need by demanding parental love; by standing up for Pecola as she faced her dark trials; by challenging nature “I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals” (149). She rebels against white oppression, forcing others to see her as one who is not a reflection of

whiteness. She represents the positive self-image that one day she would shatter the bindings and norms that suppressed the blacks to establish the structural framework of the self. She represented a new vision of African American femininity that would promote the slogan “Black is beautiful”. And that will establish the existence of the blacks as beings in this world.

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