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Society, Blackness, Madness: A Reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Home*

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Ce mémoire intitulé

Society, Blackness, Madness: A Reading of Toni Morrison's

The Bluest Eye* and *Home

Présenté par

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A évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes

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Résumé

Ce mémoire explore de manière approfondie *The Bluest Eye* et *Home* de Toni Morrison en abordant l'importance d'être noir dans une société antagoniste. Je démontre comment le traumatisme se manifeste différemment dans ces deux romans en examinant les impacts sur le développement psychologique individuel et les répercussions sur soi et sur la société. Pour affiner cette enquête, deux cadres critiques sont utilisés: le concept de double-conscience de W.E.B. Du Bois et le regard étranger. Le mémoire est divisé en deux chapitres méticuleusement rédigés. Le premier chapitre dévoile le rôle de la société dans la formation des traumatismes vécus par des personnages tels que Pecola Breedlove, Pauline et Cholly Breedlove dans *The Bluest Eye*. J'analyse comment les facteurs sociétaux – allant des normes culturelles aux préjugés raciaux et aux inégalités systémiques – ont tissé les expériences traumatisantes des personnages. Dans le deuxième chapitre, l'accent est mis sur *Home* et le personnage de Frank Money, dont la vie est marquée par la violence raciale, laissant des marques indélébiles sur son psychisme. J'explore le lien entre la violence et la masculinité, en contextualisant ses expériences pendant la guerre de Corée et les conséquences de celle-ci. Le retour de Frank en Géorgie devient un microcosme de son conflit interne, décrivant la tension entre son désir de rentrer chez lui et l'aliénation infligée par une société raciste. J'examine également le traumatisme subi par Ycidra et l'interaction entre la souffrance et la résilience. Ce mémoire analyse les thèmes de la responsabilité, de la culpabilité et de la rédemption en tant que voies vers la guérison.

Mots-clés: oppression raciale, traumatisme, identité, communauté, société, conscience, regard, violence, guérison, redemption.

Abstract

This thesis embarks on a profound exploration of Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye* and *Home*, to grapple with the question of the significance of being black in an antagonistic society. I investigate how trauma manifests differently within these two novels, examining its impacts on individual psychological development and its far-reaching repercussions on both the self and society. To refine this inquiry, this thesis employs two critical frameworks: W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness and the notion of the alien gaze. This thesis unfolds across two meticulously crafted chapters. The first chapter unearths the role of society in shaping the traumas experienced by characters such as Pecola Breedlove, Pauline, and Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*. This chapter masterfully dissects how societal factors—ranging from cultural norms to racial biases and systemic inequalities—have intricately woven the traumatic experiences of these characters. In the second chapter, the focus shifts to *Home* and the character of Frank Money, whose life is marred by racial violence, leaving indelible marks on his psyche. I explore the link between violence and masculinity, contextualizing his experiences in the Korean War and their haunting aftermath. The portrayal of Frank's return to Georgia becomes a microcosm of his internal conflict, depicting the tension between his yearning for home and the alienation inflicted by a racist society. I also examine the trauma faced by Ycidra and the interplay of suffering and resilience. Importantly, this thesis dissects themes of accountability, guilt, and redemption as pathways to healing.

Keywords: racial oppression, trauma, identity, community, society, consciousness, gaze, violence, healing, redemption.

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Introduction

Through a close reading of Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and her tenth novel, *Home*, this thesis responds to the question of the meaning of being a black person in a hostile society. With my thesis, I investigate how trauma manifests differently in both novels affecting one's psychological development and its repercussions on oneself and society. I aim to refine my research by exploring the application of the following theories: Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness and the alien gaze. I divide my thesis into two primary chapters. The first chapter will specifically explore the role of society in shaping the traumas experienced by the main character, Pecola Breedlove, as well as her parents, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove. The chapter will delve into how societal factors, such as cultural norms, racial biases, and systemic inequalities, have influenced and contributed to the traumatic experiences of these characters. The second chapter will focus on examining various forms of violence, both perpetrated by society at large and by individual characters within the narrative. The chapter's analysis encompasses a range of different types of violence, including physical, emotional, psychological, and systemic violence.

Double-consciousness is a term coined by the influential African American sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist, W.E.B. Du Bois, in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903 (Moore 751). This concept is central to understanding the psychological and emotional experiences of African Americans in a racially stratified society. It refers to the internal conflict and duality of identity that African Americans often grapple with, as they navigate the complexities of being both black and American (Moore 752). Du Bois describes double-consciousness as "the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (5). It is the feeling of constantly being aware of how society perceives and judges one's identity as a black person,

which shapes the way individuals see themselves (Du Bois 5). The concept of double-consciousness arises from the historical context of racism and oppression that African Americans have faced in the United States (Moore 755). Throughout history, African Americans have been subjected to systemic racism, discrimination, and dehumanization. This has created a cultural divide between black and white communities, where black individuals often have to navigate their self-concept through the lens of the dominant white society. Du Bois argues that African Americans possess a dual identity, both as part of the broader American society and as members of a marginalized racial group (5). This duality creates a tension within individuals, as they must reconcile their own self-perceptions with the distorted perceptions of the dominant culture (Du Bois 5).

For African Americans, double-consciousness is an ever-present aspect of their lives, influencing how they see themselves, their relationships with others, and their sense of belonging (Stuckey 456). The concept also sheds light on the psychological toll of racism, as individuals are forced to internalize the negative stereotypes and biased judgments that society projects onto them (Moore 753). Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness has remained a seminal and enduring framework for understanding the experiences of African Americans and other marginalized communities. It continues to be a relevant and powerful tool for analyzing the complex interplay of race, identity, and society, serving as a foundation for discussions on racial inequality, social justice, and the ongoing struggle for civil rights.

The alien gaze refers to the act of observing, perceiving, and interpreting individuals or cultures from a different cultural or social background (Wallowitz 154). It involves an external perspective that often comes from a position of privilege or power, and it can result in objectification, stereotyping, or romanticizing of the othered group (Wallowitz 156). This gaze is

deeply rooted in the dynamics of colonialism, imperialism, and cultural hegemony, where dominant societies have historically imposed their views and values onto others (Wallowitz 156). Furthermore, it tends to emphasize the differences between cultures and perpetuates notions of "us versus them," fostering a sense of superiority in the observer (Wallowitz 156).

Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and prominent postcolonial theorist, argued that colonized people, whose sense of self-worth has been eroded by the suppression of their local cultural identity, are confronted with the dominant language and culture of the colonizing nation (18). He suggests that, as a result of colonization and the imposition of the colonizer's values, these colonized peoples are stripped of their cultural originality and are made to feel inferior (Fanon 18). Fanon's assertion highlights the psychological impact of colonization. He argues that the imposition of the colonizer's culture and language exacerbates the colonized people's sense of inferiority, as they come to view their own identity and heritage as inferior to that of the colonizer (Fanon 18). This internalized inferiority complex, in turn, perpetuates the dynamics of colonization and cultural domination (Fanon 18). Fanon's work focuses on the psychological effects of colonialism and the ways in which it shapes the identity, consciousness, and resistance of colonized peoples (Moore 752). He underscores the profound influence that colonialism has on the collective psyche and cultural outlook of those subjected to it.

Indeed, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* resonates with Fanon's insights by illuminating the deep-seated psychological ramifications of internalized racism and cultural subjugation. The novel delves into the lives of African American characters in a racially stratified society, highlighting how the pervasive beauty standards of the dominant white culture corrode their self-worth and cultivate a profound sense of inadequacy (Morrison 15). As Fanon elucidates, the characters in *The Bluest Eye* grapple with an inherited psychological burden, their self-identity tarnished by

societal notions of inferiority rooted in colonial legacies. The story underscores how these internalized beliefs permeate their consciousness, shaping their actions, desires, and relationships. Through poignant narratives, Morrison and Fanon converge in revealing the enduring impact of historical injustices on marginalized communities, underscoring the importance of resistance and reclaiming cultural agency.

In my first chapter, I will explore the multifaceted factors contributing to Pecola's distorted self-image and descent into madness, with a focus on how societal racism plays a pivotal role in shaping her identity. Through a close analysis of Pecola's experiences, thoughts, and interactions with others, I aim to unravel the intricate web of racism's impact on her sense of self and belonging. The era of the Great Depression in *The Bluest Eye* is a crucial backdrop for understanding the novel's exploration of societal racism (Morrison 8). During this period, racial segregation and discrimination were deeply entrenched in American society, perpetuating a system that devalued and marginalized black individuals like Pecola. The novel captures the complex interplay of racism, classism, and gender biases that converge to shape Pecola's experiences and self-perception. As an eleven-year-old black girl, Pecola faces multiple layers of oppression that intersect to form her identity in a racist society (Morrison 8). The obsession with obtaining blue eyes, which she believes will grant her acceptance and beauty, underscores the internalization of white beauty standards and the pervasive influence of white supremacy on her self-esteem (Morrison 34). The desire for blue eyes is emblematic of the internalized racism that plagues not only Pecola but also the broader black population. Through Pecola's interactions with her family, friends, and community, Morrison portrays the rejection she encounters based on her gender, racial identity, and class status. The novel dissects the harmful effects of racism on her psyche, as she internalizes the negative attitudes and perceptions projected onto her by others (Morrison 47). Her

unwavering determination to attain blue eyes and become closely connected with Western culture within a society that devalues her reveals an exploration of her yearning for acceptance and assimilation and a commentary on the immense emotional toll of racial discrimination (Morrison 139). Pecola's self-loathing, a product of external rejection and internalized racism, drives her into madness, culminating in the novel's tragic and haunting exploration of the consequences of racism on mental health (Morrison 139). The novel presents a stark and poignant critique of a society that perpetuates racial hierarchies, leading to the destruction of an innocent young girl's sense of self and well-being (Morrison 139). In studying Pecola's journey, I am particularly interested in exploring how a subject is formed in a racist society. Du Bois's concept of double- consciousness becomes a guiding lens through which we can comprehend Pecola's fractured identity. Her constant struggle to reconcile her own sense of self with the dominant white gaze reflects the internal conflict faced by many individuals living in a racially stratified world. As I embark on this exploration of *The Bluest Eye*, my aim is to shed light on the deeply entrenched effects of societal racism on an individual's psyche and the interplay between self-image, poor self-esteem, detestation, and madness. By focusing on Pecola's experiences, I hope to deepen our understanding of the intricate and devastating consequences of racism and its lasting impact on individuals living within its suffocating grasp. Through this examination, I seek to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding racial identity, societal prejudices, and the urgent need for social transformation and compassion.

In my second chapter, I will delve into Toni Morrison's novel *Home*, focusing on the protagonist, Frank Money, and the profound impact of racial violence on his psychological development. Frank's experiences with racial violence leave a lasting mark on his psyche, manifested as PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder (Morrison 43). I will explore how this

trauma influences Frank's understanding of manhood, leading to a correlation between violence and masculinity in his life. Frank's upbringing under the care of his step-grandmother exposes him to mistreatment and injustice, further compounding the trauma he carries (Morrison 63). His service in the Korean War adds another layer of trauma, as he witnesses and participates in violent acts that haunt him long after the war ends (Morrison 43). In examining Frank's experiences, I will draw a link between his bodily schema and the societal impact of his violent actions. The way Frank navigates his body through violent acts reflects the complex interplay between individual actions and their repercussions on society at large. Frank's journey back to Georgia serves as a focal point of internal conflict, evoking a sense of both home and homelessness. His return becomes an internal war, as he grapples with memories of war and confronts a racist society that perpetuates his sense of alienation and lack of belonging. The white gaze and lack of equality in this society further exacerbate Frank's feelings of homelessness and disconnection. Ycidra, Frank's sister, also faces physical and psychological trauma due to racism, leaving her feeling both physically and emotionally homeless. The intergenerational trauma and societal pressures she endures affect her psyche, creating a complex portrait of suffering and resilience. Despite the profound traumas experienced by Frank and Ycidra, Morrison's novel leaves open the possibility of healing (Morrison 194). I will explore how themes of accountability, guilt, and redemption are woven into the narrative, suggesting that individuals can recover from their traumas. The novel's exploration of healing invites a closer examination of the complexities of resilience and the transformative power of introspection and self-accountability. Through my analysis, I hope to illuminate the multi-layered themes of trauma, race, identity, and healing in *Home*. Morrison's nuanced depiction of her characters' struggles with intergenerational and societal traumas challenges readers to confront the lasting impact of racism and violence on individuals and

communities. By examining the potential for healing and redemption, I aim to shed light on the novel's optimistic message of hope and resilience in the face of profound suffering.

Through compelling narratives and complex characters, Morrison weaves together the psychological and emotional struggles faced by her protagonists, offering readers important insights into the enduring effects of racism and societal expectations. These novels stand as testaments to Morrison's literary genius and her unwavering commitment to exploring the complexities of the human condition.

Chapter One

Society, Ideologies, and Learning

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the excerpts from the primer about Dick and Jane serve as a poignant and ironic commentary on the pervasive influence of white culture, the distortion of ideals, and the impact of racial oppression on the lives of black children. The primer about Dick and Jane was a real-life educational tool widely used to teach children how to read in mid-20th-century America (Klotman 125). However, its representation in the novel takes on a deeply symbolic and critical role. The primer's simplified, sanitized depiction of the white middle-class American family serves as a stark contrast to the lives of the black characters in the novel (Morrison 8). This contrast highlights the glaring divide between the socially accepted norms of whiteness and the marginalized existence of the Breedlove family and other black characters. The primer presents a false and idealized image of family life, reinforcing the myth of the American Dream while ignoring the realities faced by black families (Morrison 8). For the black children in the story, including Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, the primer becomes a vehicle through which they learn about societal values and beauty standards (Morrison 8). As they learn to read from the primer, they absorb not just the mechanics of reading, but also the cultural values and norms that are embedded in the text. The primer perpetuates the notion that the white world depicted is the "right" world, creating feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among black children who do not see themselves represented in the narrative. The use of the primer as a tool to teach children to read also emphasizes the way education is used to reinforce racial hierarchies (Morrison 8). By learning to read through a text that disregards black experiences and marginalizes black culture, these children are taught from an early age that their own stories and identities are not important. This perpetuates a cycle where black children are taught to value whiteness and to see themselves as

lesser than their white counterparts. The inclusion of the primer excerpts serves to criticize the educational system's role in perpetuating the white gaze and internalized racism, underlining the complex interplay between societal ideals and personal identity. It demonstrates how early education shapes the way children perceive themselves and the world around them, leading them to internalize societal biases and reinforce the notion of white superiority.

A. Social Construction of Beauty Ideals

Pecola's infatuation with Shirley Temple is a manifestation of how societal beauty norms, rooted in white standards of attractiveness, play a pivotal role in shaping her self-perception and engendering an underlying sense of inferiority. This adoration reflects a wider issue ingrained within the larger society – one that prioritizes certain physical traits and appearances while marginalizing those that deviate from these norms (Morrison 15). The allure of Shirley Temple for Pecola lies in the fact that Temple embodies the epitome of beauty within Pecola's cultural landscape. The significance of fair skin, light eyes, and Eurocentric features is deep-rooted, leading Pecola to yearn for qualities she believes will render her beautiful and desirable (Morrison 34). This societal beauty construct engenders an inferiority complex, as Pecola internalizes the message that she is only valuable if she conforms to these ideals. Her intense preoccupation with Shirley Temple is exemplified by her excessive consumption of milk just to obtain a cup associated with Temple (Morrison 22). This illustrates Pecola's earnest internalization of the notion that possessing something related to beauty can elevate her worth (Morrison 22). The superficiality of her focus on physical appearance, rather than personal talents or qualities, underscores the depth to which these beauty ideals have permeated her self-concept. Her desire for blue eyes, symbolic of both whiteness and acceptance, is emblematic of the wider societal pressure to conform and assimilate into the dominant culture. This aspiration highlights the insidious power of cultural assimilation –

a desire to shed her own identity and be embraced by the majority. This phenomenon underscores the extent to which societal norms influence personal perceptions and aspirations (Morrison 34). Patrice Hamilton's assertion that subscribing to white standards of beauty perpetuates self-hatred aligns with Pecola's experience (116). Pecola internalizes these standards, perpetuating a cycle of self-deprecation and internal conflict. This dynamic reflects a broader societal issue where black individuals often grapple with reconciling their own identities with imposed norms (Baldwin 179).

Furthermore, it emphasizes the misconception that altering her appearance would mitigate Pecola's feelings of inadequacy. It underscores that the root of her self-perceived "ugliness" is not her physical features but the systemic racism that devalues blackness. The societal perception that equates blackness with inferiority serves as a reminder of the structural inequalities rooted within the fabric of society. By equating blackness with inferiority, society perpetuates a deeply ingrained systemic bias. Pecola's experiences become a reminder of the structural inequalities that are deeply woven into the foundation of society, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others. The societal lens that reduces her worth based on her skin color reinforces the broader themes of racism and the power dynamics that have far-reaching consequences on personal identity. Through Pecola's journey, Morrison illustrates the intricate interplay between individual identity, societal norms, and the lasting impact of beauty standards and racism on self-perception. The prism of beauty standards distorts Pecola's self-image, leading her to yearn for the blue eyes that she believes will lift her from the margins of societal acceptance. This yearning, however, is a manifestation of the broader societal constructs that dictate what is considered beautiful and acceptable.

B. The Role of Cinema in Society

The assertion that the cinematic world perpetuates self-loathing within the black community is closely tied to the idea of the white gaze. The white gaze refers to the way in which predominantly white industries, like cinema, portray people of color and influence their self-perception by framing them through a white lens (Wallowitz 156). This dynamic is especially pronounced when it comes to black individuals and communities in film. The cinematic portrayal of self-loathing and racism within the black community is not just a reflection of societal dynamics but also a reinforcement of those dynamics (Morrison 48). By depicting characters who internalize negative stereotypes, harbor self-doubt, or engage in self-destructive behaviors, films inadvertently perpetuate the notion that these feelings and behaviors are inherent to black identity. This portrayal effectively keeps alive the idea that self-hatred is a natural part of being black.

The normalization of inequality through cinematic representation is a powerful tool in sustaining societal divisions. When these portrayals are perpetuated on the big screen, they contribute to a collective consciousness where these harmful dynamics are accepted as normal (Morrison 83). This normalization of inequality maintains the status quo, making it difficult to challenge or dismantle systemic racism. The concept of the white gaze intersects with Owens Moore's observation about the lasting impact of slavery (757). The presence of the former oppressor, as Moore points out, means that historical power imbalances continue to influence contemporary perceptions and experiences (757). The cinematic world, through its portrayals, often reinforces these imbalances, framing black individuals and communities within a context that has roots in historical oppression. In this context, the white gaze becomes a powerful tool that reinforces the narrative of inferiority and self-loathing. Cinematic portrayals not only shape how black individuals see themselves but also how the larger society perceives and interacts with them.

This creates a cyclical relationship where media representations both reflect and shape societal attitudes. Recognizing and challenging the influence of the white gaze in cinema is crucial for dismantling the damaging narratives and promoting more accurate and empowering representations of the black experience.

There is this imbalance of resources in American culture, political power, and socioeconomic status, leading the white community to believe that they are superior and to assume that blacks are inferior, beliefs that some African Americans subscribe to as well. Pecola's sense of inferiority originates from the celebration of the dominant culture and dismissal of her culture. Considering that Pecola's inferiority complex is "created" (Fanon 18) demonstrates that it is not a feeling that one is born with, but rather appears as a result of mainstream, white, middle-class society operating as superior, leading to the assumed inferiority of those who do not meet these criteria (Fanon 18). Pecola's path to self-love remains obstructed as long as she clings to feelings of inferiority (Fanon 42). Pecola's "ugliness" does not originate from within but rather from her environment. Pecola's entire entourage, whether her mother, friends, or classmates, all see ugliness in her blackness and lack of self-assertion (Morrison 36). This outside force inevitably results in Pecola growing up aspiring to be white and thus refusing to see the beauty or worth of her blackness. Pecola is an eleven-year-old child, and yet her detachment from her culture is exceedingly strong (Morrison 15). Pecola assimilating to whiteness and disconnecting with African American culture furthers the issue as she does not want to be black, but she can also never be white. Pecola is then stuck in this in-betweenness as she is not able to celebrate and embrace her blackness, and she is also not considered equal to the dominant culture. As Hamilton argues, "without the strength of love for one's cultural identity, vulnerable members of minorities are in real danger of being starved by both black and white environments" (122). Pecola's in-betweenness thus results in her alienation.

Knowing that she is ugly but not seeing the ugliness that people see in her, emphasizes that beauty is a mold created by society (Morrison 36). Pecola's obsession with looking like a doll with yellow locks and blue eyes arises from society's idea of what beauty represents; her recognition that she does not fit in that mold results in her belief that she is inferior.

C. Community and Racial Hierarchy

Maureen and Pecola both navigate a society where racial hierarchies and beauty standards shape their experiences, with Maureen benefiting from her closer alignment with white ideals and Pecola facing the devastating consequences of internalized racism. Maureen's self-perception and her awareness of her light skin and green eyes reflect the privileges associated with a closer proximity to whiteness. Her mixed-race heritage positions her differently within the racial hierarchy, affording her a degree of social acceptance that Pecola does not experience (Morrison 47). Maureen's awareness of her racial identity and her understanding of her position in relation to the dominant race enables her to feel confident and secure in her appearance (Wallowitz 156). The contrast between Maureen's self-assuredness and Pecola's vulnerability is emblematic of the broader societal dynamics at play. Lighter skin, Eurocentric features, and the absence of pronounced African features grant Maureen a level of protection from systemic racism. In contrast, Pecola, with her darker skin and more visibly African features, is subjected to the full force of discriminatory beauty standards. This underscores the intersection of racial identity and beauty standards, revealing how internalized racism perpetuates the belief that certain physical traits are inherently superior or inferior. Maureen's comments and intrusive questions expose how these beliefs manifest in interpersonal interactions and contribute to the larger system of inequality (Morrison 49).

Expanding on the dynamics between Maureen and Pecola reveals an interplay of power, superiority, and inequality within the context of their relationship. Maureen's sense of superiority is rooted in her racial and socio-economic privilege, and she uses this privilege to assert dominance over Pecola, who comes from a disadvantaged background (Morrison 49). Maureen's degradation of Pecola underscores the ingrained racial and social hierarchies present in the society depicted in the story (Morrison 49). Her actions accentuate how individuals with perceived advantages wield their power to reinforce their own sense of self-worth while marginalizing those who are considered "lesser" (Morrison 49). Indeed, Maureen uses her sense of superiority and power to degrade Pecola, displaying the inequality between them (Morrison 49). Maureen's behavior can also be seen as a manifestation of internalized racism, where she has absorbed societal messages about her own superiority and Pecola's inferiority, leading her to believe she has the right to belittle and degrade Pecola (Morrison 49). Pecola, on the other hand, internalizes this treatment, which further contributes to her low self-esteem and self-worth. The consistent degradation from someone like Maureen, who embodies the societal standards of beauty and desirability, only exacerbates Pecola's belief that she is fundamentally unworthy. The power dynamic between Maureen and Pecola showcases how systemic inequalities lead to a cycle of oppression and self-hatred. It is important to consider the broader themes that Morrison addresses through the characters of Maureen and Pecola. The novel delves into the destructive impacts of internalized racism, societal beauty standards, and the perpetuation of inequality. Maureen's treatment of Pecola serves as a microcosm of the larger social issues Morrison is exploring, highlighting how personal interactions can reflect and perpetuate systemic injustices.

The Gaze

A. The Collective Gaze

The destructive nature of the collective gaze's impact on Pecola becomes evident through the amalgamation of negative emotions—ignorance, self-hatred, and hopelessness—underlining its potent influence on her psyche. The insults hurled at Pecola in the form of the nonsensical chant, "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked" (Morrison 47), reflect a lack of understanding and empathy. The boys' words indicate their ignorance about the complex realities of Pecola's life (Morrison 46). Instead of engaging with her as a fellow human being, they objectify her based on superficial characteristics (Morrison 47). This ignorance is not just about Pecola; it is also a reflection of their ignorance about their own shared experiences as black individuals in a racist society. By embracing such a demeaning and shallow perspective, they perpetuate a culture of ignorance that prevents any meaningful connection or understanding. Also, the collective gaze's ability to consolidate self-hatred is striking. The boys' insults are laced with their own internalized self-loathing, projected onto Pecola (Morrison 47). Their choice to ridicule her blackness and speculate about her father's behavior underscores their internal conflicts and struggles with their own identities. The insults hold an even deeper layer of impact due to the shared blackness between the boys and Pecola (Morrison 47). The fact that they are also black should lead to solidarity, but it is instead turned into a tool for further degradation (Morrison 47). This underlines the insidious influence of internalized self-hatred, where the boys project their own insecurities onto Pecola. Indeed, the insults are not merely directed at Pecola; they are an expression of their own unresolved issues. This collective self-hatred is profoundly ingrained, leading them to attack someone who mirrors aspects of themselves they despise. The collective gaze's force is fueled by a sense of hopelessness that has been festering over time. The image of a "fiery cone of scorn" (Morrison 47)

suggests an accumulation of frustration and despair. This hopelessness stems from their understanding of the racial hierarchies and societal biases that they must navigate daily. Their derogatory words are a product of the hopelessness they feel in the face of systemic racism—an attempt to exert a semblance of control in a world that often renders them powerless. In consolidating ignorance, self-hatred, and hopelessness into a unified force of scorn, the boys amplify the harm they inflict upon Pecola. Their collective gaze serves as a manifestation of the societal pressures that drive them to participate in this cruel spectacle. The cyclical nature of this behavior also underscores the broader theme of how the perpetuation of harm becomes normalized within a community. This collective gaze is a microcosm of the larger societal issues explored throughout the novel, such as the impact of internalized racism, the cycle of abuse, and the ways in which systemic injustices can lead individuals to harm themselves and others. It is a reminder that the harm inflicted upon Pecola is not solely about the boys themselves but is a reflection of the broader societal attitudes that allow such harm to persist.

B. Pauline

Pauline Breedlove's extensive immersion in the world of movies deeply influences her perception of love, beauty, and the ideal family. Her preoccupation with movies not only shapes her understanding of these concepts but also contributes to her feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation within her own life (Morrison 83). The influence of movies on Pauline's perceptions highlights the way media can shape individuals' desires and expectations (Morrison 83). The cinematic portrayal of love, beauty, and family becomes a lens through which she views her own life, often causing her to overlook the complexities and nuances of reality. Movies often depict families in idyllic settings, emphasizing unity, happiness, and stability (Morrison 83). Pauline's own childhood, marked by feelings of "separateness and unworthiness" (Morrison 75), leads her

to yearn for the perfect family she sees on screen. The contrast between the films' portrayal of harmonious families and her own family dynamics creates a sense of longing and discontent. This discrepancy fuels her desire for a family that matches the on-screen ideal, leading her to find that sense of belonging with the Fisher family in her employment (Morrison 83). Her employment with the Fisher family provides her with the opportunity to experience the type of family environment she has always wanted (Morrison 83). This reinforces the idea that her family of origin falls short of fulfilling her emotional needs. Her inability to reconcile these idealized notions with her own experiences creates a sense of alienation and disappointment, pushing her to seek fulfillment elsewhere.

Pauline is part of a family that values and cherishes her, enabling her to reciprocate that appreciation to the Fisher family. Indeed, Pauline "withhold[s] any nurturing love from her family and especially Pecola, the other female member. Instead, any and all the nurturing love she is capable of showing is directed towards the white family whom she works for as a maid and cook" (Mahaffey 161). Pauline's desire to love the Fishers instead of her actual family indicates that she chooses to associate with the Fishers, a wealthy white family (Morrison 83). Nevertheless, what is more important than the love Pauline gives to the Fishers, is the love that the Fishers give to Pauline. Being loved by a wealthy white family gives Pauline value as "by loving me [they] prove that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white [woman]" (Fanon 63). Even when either Pecola or Cholly show any form of love towards Pauline, she appears to perceive the gesture as essentially worthless. She does not feel valued by their love as opposed to the love she receives from the Fishers (Morrison 83). Being loved by a white family means being loved by the dominant culture, suggesting that Pauline must feel equal as she is deserving of "white love" (Fanon 63). Pauline's pleasure and fulfillment with the Fisher family consumes her life and energy, and she

prizes it. Pauline and the Fishers have mutual feelings of appreciation, but it was not solely about how the Fishers make her feel emotionally, it is also how the Fishers make her feel mentally (Morrison 84). Pauline finds a new family and a new lifestyle in which "power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she never had – a nickname – Polly" (Morrison 84). Pauline, who is poor and feels unloved, finds an entire life that only exists when she is at the Fishers (Morrison 84). This is not only about being loved by the Fishers but also about living through the dominant culture's mores. Pauline is so caught up and enchanted with her life with the Fishers that she loses sight of who she truly is as she emulates them (Klotman 124).

Pauline replacing her culture with the values and ideals of the dominant culture prevents her from developing a robust sense of self, affecting her psychological development (Fanon 51). Her identification with the dominant culture causes her to compare her life to those who are more well-off and entitled. This not only misrepresents who she truly is, it misrepresents the reality of the larger society, ultimately intensifying her loathing towards her culture and her family. It is, however, more complicated than having feelings of dislike towards her family and culture, as it is also delusion. Pauline is as delusional as her daughter because she truly believes that she is one of the Fishers (Morrison 84). The more time spent with and at the Fishers, the more that Pauline lives her life according to the standards of the white family, separating her from her actual family and her culture.

Moreover, movies also frequently present conventional standards of beauty, often featuring glamorous actors with Eurocentric features. Pauline's consistent exposure to these portrayals shapes her perception of what is beautiful and desirable (Morrison 83). This, in turn, influences how she perceives herself and her family members (Morrison 83). The contrast between the idealized beauty in movies and her own reality leads to feelings of inadequacy and discontent with

her own appearance and Pecola's. This impact is particularly evident in Pauline's interactions with her own family, especially Pecola. Pauline's preoccupation with cinematic ideals makes it difficult for her to fully engage with and understand the emotional needs of her family members (Morrison 83). This disconnect, in turn, influences Pecola's perceptions of love, self-worth, and beauty, contributing to Pecola's struggles with self-loathing. Since Pecola's primary source of learning about love and relationships is her family, Pauline's emotional distance has a profound impact. Pecola's internalization of her mother's detachment contributes to her struggle with self-loathing; she interprets her mother's inability to express love as a reflection of her own worthlessness.

Pauline, just like Pecola, despises her racial identity and praises the qualities that white people possess. Considering that Pauline "enjoy[s]" (Morrison 83), taking care of the little Fisher girl reflects the delicacy and love that the little girl must feel during those bonding moments with Pauline (Morrison 83). Nonetheless, while Pauline takes care of her daughter's hair, which is "tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb" (Morrison 83), the description suggests forceful movements and irritation that Pecola observes and receives (Morrison 83). Pauline, doing so, dismisses taking care of her daughter's hair as a burden. Pecola's self-loathing partly originates from her mother's manners towards Pecola's blackness. In fact, "through her mother's blurred vision of the pink, white, and golden world of the Fishers, Pecola learns that she is ugly, unacceptable, and unloved" (Klotman 124). Pauline finding "beauty" (Morrison 83) at the Fishers implies that there is no beauty in her home, which she transmits to her family, mainly to Pecola. Pauline's lack of love towards her husband and children is mainly because of what they represent: blackness. In Pauline's case, blackness is associated with poverty and ugliness and that is what Pauline is trying to escape from. She does not want to be affiliated with her black origins due to what she believes that it means to be black, which is why she chooses not to give her love to her

family. Pauline loving the Fishers as opposed to her own family is a conscious decision. Pauline's life with the Fishers only intensifies this feeling of resentment to a point where their beliefs have become hers. As a result, Pecola grows up without the nurturing and affirmation required to foster a healthy self-esteem. This lack of self-love exacerbates Pecola's feelings of unworthiness and contributes to her internalization of societal beauty norms that perpetuate self-loathing. The cycle continues as Pecola's self-loathing influences how she interacts with the world around her, further reinforcing the damaging cycle of emotional deprivation and self-negation.

C. Cholly

Cholly's traumatic sexual experience exemplifies the devastating impact of the white gaze and systemic racism on individuals' lives, particularly within the context of sexual exploitation and degradation. Cholly's encounter is a harrowing illustration of how the white gaze objectifies and dehumanizes black bodies, perpetuating feelings of powerlessness, emasculation, and misplaced anger (Morrison 95). Cholly's initial encounter is marked by the cruel and degrading commands of two white men, who coerce him into a humiliating sexual act with Darlene (Morrison 95). This act is a stark manifestation of the white gaze in action – Cholly and Darlene are reduced to objects of entertainment, existing solely for the amusement of the white men (Morrison 95). The white men's dominance, emphasized by the presence of guns, underscores the unequal power dynamics that were prevalent during that era (Morrison 95). Cholly's impotence and desperation to escape the situation, coupled with the lack of any agency or control, epitomize the helplessness that the white gaze engenders. Cholly's desire for his sexual encounter with Darlene to be "hard, long, and painful" (Morrison 96) speaks to his attempt to reclaim a sense of masculinity he perceives has been emasculated. This desire emerges from his need to regain qualities that align with traditional

notions of manhood, which he feels have been stripped away. The description of his body "searching for shelter" and "remaining paralyzed" (Morrison 95) emphasizes his vulnerability and inability to assert himself. The white gaze strips Cholly of his autonomy and dignity, leaving him trapped in a degrading act that he has no control over. As the encounter progresses, Cholly's emotions transform from humiliation to hatred (Morrison 96). His hatred towards Darlene symbolizes a complicated emotional response rooted in both his own trauma and the societal pressures of racism. While his anger is misdirected towards Darlene, it speaks to the broader impact of internalized racism within the black community. Cholly's inability to direct his anger towards the white men reflects the normalized suppression of resentment against white oppressors. Cholly's hatred towards Darlene also reveals the self-loathing that racism can cultivate. When he looks at Darlene, he sees not just her but also the blackness that he associates with humiliation, powerlessness, and oppression. His inability to separate his emotions from the broader societal context results in him projecting his own self-hatred onto Darlene, further compounding her trauma. In his article, "The Concept of the Black Subject in Fanon," Tendayi Sithole argues that "the White gaze is not only the look; it is the crushing weight unto Blackness. For Fanon to be reminded of his Blackness is the very fact of reminding Blackness of its place in the anti-Black world, and that place means being expelled" (29). In this case, Cholly is forced to think about his blackness as it is the reason why he is being psychologically abused. The power of racism and the white gaze is monumental as it affects Cholly's life instantly and permanently, leading his hate to remain throughout his adulthood and shape him. The two white men have an outsized role in Cholly's life, affecting not only Cholly but also his wife, son, and daughter, creating a ripple effect. This scene powerfully underscores the insidious ways in which the white gaze perpetuates and reinforces systemic racism. It showcases how racism not only damages the relationships between

black individuals but also distorts their self-perception and expressions of emotion. Cholly's experience is emblematic of the broader impact of racism on self-identity and inter-community dynamics, highlighting how deeply embedded these issues are within the foundation of society.

Furthermore, Cholly's sexual paralysis, depicted as his inability to perform, is a manifestation of the racist societal influences that have permeated his perception of self and sexuality, impacting his bodily schema as discussed by Frantz Fanon. The bodily schema is a concept that Fanon articulates as an individual's awareness of their own body and how they experience it in relation to their environment and society (111). Fanon specifically examines how the bodily schema of black individuals is influenced by the racialized perceptions and prejudices of a predominantly white society (111). Fanon's exploration of the bodily schema is a critical component of his broader analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism, racism, and oppression on the black psyche. He argues that dismantling these distorted perceptions and reclaiming a positive and authentic bodily schema is essential for the psychological liberation and empowerment of black individuals (Fanon 111). Cholly's physical response and subsequent behaviors are intricately intertwined with the environment and traumatic experiences he encounters. The white men's degrading gaze and the oppressive environment they create directly impact Cholly's bodily reactions during that crucial moment, leaving an enduring imprint on his psyche (Morrison 95). Cholly's impotence is a manifestation of his degradation, helplessness, and powerlessness in that traumatic context, which ultimately inflicts deep-seated trauma upon him. This trauma, as a festering wound, becomes the root cause of his later destructive sexual behaviors with both Pauline and Pecola. Cholly's inability to heal from the past trauma leaves an indelible imprint on his mind, brain, and body, influencing his actions in the present (Kolk 32). The passage of time between the

incident with Darlene and the assault on Pecola underscores the enduring nature of his trauma, as he remains trapped in its grip without finding healing or redemption.

Cholly's desperate bid to regain a semblance of masculinity is evident through his sexually violent acts towards his wife and, most tragically, his daughter, Pecola. His assault on both women reflects his distorted pursuit of power and dominance, driven by his overwhelming sense of emasculation stemming from past experience, compounded by poverty and poor choices. Cholly's consciousness of the harm he inflicts, paired with his inability to resist his impulses, stresses the power of trauma to distort one's perceptions and drive them toward harmful actions (Morrison 111). The shocking nature of his actions toward Pecola exposes the profound scars left by his trauma, demonstrating the novel's exploration of how past experiences shape present behavior and perpetuate cycles of harm across generations (Morrison 111). Cholly raping his wife, Pauline, serves as a chilling manifestation of his attempt to assert control in their sexual relationship; however, it is through the disturbing act of raping his own daughter, Pecola, that the full extent of his trauma-induced desperation and pathology become most painfully apparent. Pecola's vulnerability—her smallness, fragility, and powerlessness—becomes a twisted outlet for Cholly's attempt to reclaim a sense of power that he feels has been eroded over time. Cholly's gaze towards Pecola is tainted by his own traumatic experiences and the larger societal context of systemic racism. Cholly's history of being subjected to the white gaze during his traumatic encounter contributes to his distorted understanding of power and intimacy. Cholly's vision of Pecola is marked by a disturbing mix of desire, confusion, and misplaced emotions (Morrison 111). His sexual misconduct towards his daughter is a tragic manifestation of his own internalized pain and self-loathing. His inability to separate his traumatic past from his actions perpetuates a cycle of abuse and victimization. For Pecola, Cholly's gaze represents a devastating betrayal of trust and

the exploitation of her vulnerability (Morrison 111). As a young girl yearning for love and validation, she looks to her father for protection and care. Cholly's actions strip her of her innocence and agency, reinforcing her internalized sense of worthlessness. The power dynamics at play in their gaze mirror the broader societal power imbalances present in a racially segregated environment. Cholly's misguided attempt at asserting dominance over his own daughter is a reflection of the ingrained hierarchies of power and the dehumanizing effects of systemic racism. His actions highlight how the white gaze can infiltrate interpersonal relationships within the black community, further perpetuating cycles of harm and abuse. In a broader context, the gaze between Cholly and Pecola serves as a tragic representation of how a history of oppression, trauma, and internalized self-hatred can manifest in deeply destructive ways within familial relationships. Cholly's gaze towards Pecola is a painful reminder of how systemic racism corrodes self-worth and distorts personal connections, causing individuals to perpetuate cycles of abuse and self-destruction. Their relationship becomes a tragic illustration of how the white gaze and the legacy of racism can fracture familial bonds.

Healing

The Bluest Eye paints a bleak picture of intergenerational trauma by illustrating that healing remains elusive for Pecola and the characters around her. Despite the potential for hope, Morrison's narrative ultimately resists offering a resolution or redemption, stressing the pervasive nature of trauma (Morrison 141). Pecola's journey is marked by her inability to escape the cycle of trauma that engulfs her family and community. The absence of a support system, understanding, and effective tools for healing perpetuates her emotional and psychological struggles. Pecola's hope for blue eyes represents a misguided belief that changing her physical appearance could bring her

acceptance and happiness, revealing her profound desperation for a way out of her painful reality. However, her yearning for blue eyes only intensifies her self-loathing, underscoring the futility of her search for validation and transformation through external means. Morrison's narrative stance is notably non-hopeful, reflecting the broader societal context of racial inequality and oppression. The lack of healing in the novel is not merely confined to Pecola; it extends to other characters as well. The Breedlove family's internalized self-hatred and emotional isolation, Pauline's obsession with a cinematic ideal, and Cholly's destructive behavior all reflect the inescapable grip of trauma. The community's indifference and blindness towards Pecola's suffering further emphasize the systemic nature of the issues at hand. This lack of resolution is significant as it challenges the notion of a neat and optimistic ending. The novel's portrayal of intergenerational trauma serves as a commentary on the deep-rooted societal issues that continue to persist. By depicting the complexities of trauma and its repercussions, Morrison highlights the urgency of addressing systemic racism and the broader societal forces that contribute to the perpetuation of suffering across generations.

A. Intergenerational Trauma

Pecola's intergenerational trauma is deeply rooted in her parents' unresolved emotional wounds, leading to a distorted self-perception. Had Pauline and Cholly worked through the imprint of their own traumatic experiences and provided responsive care, her experience would have been different, reflecting the significance of caregivers' emotional stability in buffering children from psychological scars during disasters, as argued by Bessel van der Kolk (63). Nonetheless, Pecola's lack of responsive parental support resulted in her enduring trauma, further perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational trauma as her parents' unresolved issues became hers to grapple with, depicting the lasting impact of unaddressed trauma across generations (Kolk 63).

B. Community

Toni Morrison presents a community marked by its lack of solidarity and empathy, which in turn underlines the pervasive and systemic nature of the societal issues being addressed. The community's indifference and blindness to Pecola's suffering serve as a powerful commentary on the deep-rooted effects of racism and beauty standards, as well as the ways in which these issues fracture and isolate individuals within the community. Pecola's experiences of racism, poverty, and neglect are met with an unsettling lack of concern from those around her. The community members, driven by their own prejudices and internalized racism, fail to recognize or address the pain she endures. This indifference underscores the normalization of such suffering within the community and echoes the broader societal context in which these issues persist. The absence of solidarity within the community reveals the extent to which individuals have internalized the dominant culture's standards and biases. Rather than rallying together to support one another against these external pressures, the characters engage in their own struggles for acceptance within the prevailing norms. This lack of unity perpetuates a cycle of isolation, as each person navigates their pain individually, without the collective strength that could potentially counteract the systemic forces at play. Also, the community's blindness to Pecola's suffering reflects a larger societal pattern of turning a blind eye to the pain of marginalized individuals. By failing to acknowledge her experiences and provide the necessary support, the community contributes to her isolation and ultimately exacerbates her descent into madness. This portrayal is a critique of the ways in which societal issues are perpetuated by the complicity and apathy of bystanders.

C. Madness

Pecola's descent into madness as a result of society's unattainable beauty standards and lack of love is portrayed as a tragic consequence of her profound trauma. Seeking validation through the

transformative power of blue eyes, Pecola's distorted belief in her own transformation reflects the deep-seated impact of trauma on her mental state (Morrison 129). Her impaired mental capacity and hallucinations underscore trauma's potential to reconfigure perception and thinking, as noted by Kolk (32). Pecola's need for constant reassurance about the blueness of her eyes speaks to her desperate desire to align herself with the dominant standards of beauty in her society (Morrison 129). This connection between blue eyes and beauty underscores her internalization of the cultural obsession with whiteness and the damaging impact of these ideals on her self-worth. Her fear that someone might possess bluer eyes than hers reveals the extent to which she views beauty as a finite resource, and her obsession with achieving the bluest eyes exemplifies her longing to be accepted within these arbitrary norms (Morrison 129). Morrison's portrayal of madness as a manifestation of cultural self-sabotage underscores the broader theme of the novel—the corrosive effects of internalized racism and societal pressures (Santangelo 11). Pecola's mental deterioration is an illustration of how societal norms can shape personal identity to the point of self-destruction. The American national culture's celebration of whiteness and disdain for anything different contributes to Pecola's self-loathing and her perception of her own inadequacy.

However, Pecola's madness is far from being a sign of weakness, as it is a form of resistance that emerges as a response to the profound adversities she faces as a child. The hardships and traumas she endures, including racism, poverty, and lack of love, contribute to the unraveling of her mental state. Pecola's madness can be interpreted as a subversion of societal norms and expectations (Garvey 298). Her psychological fragmentation can be viewed as a coping mechanism—a way to navigate a world that has consistently denied her agency and worth. Or as Marta Caminero-Santangelo argues, "Pecola's madness results as a coping mechanism as her madness was not the result of an inherited weakness (as the evolutionists had claimed) or of faulty

or incomplete development (as Freud had suggested), but rather a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in unlivable situation" (8). Morrison's portrayal of Pecola's madness as a response to societal expectations underscores the novel's exploration of the destructive impact of systemic racism and beauty standards. Pecola's descent into madness is a reminder that the external pressures of society, combined with personal trauma, can result in profound psychological turmoil. It challenges readers to question the role of society in shaping individuals' mental health.

Chapter Two

Manhood

The depiction of manhood in Toni Morrison's *Home* delves into the transformative journeys of Frank Money, challenging conventional notions of masculinity through the tropes of familial neglect, war, and self-discovery. Frank's destructive interpretation of manhood stems from the deprivation he experienced in his childhood and continues to intensify as he transitions into adulthood. Frank is compelled to assume the responsibilities of manhood at an exceptionally tender age, due to the absence of nurturing parental figures, specifically his neglectful mother and abusive step-grandmother, which hinders his psychological development and forces him into premature adulthood. The responsibility of taking care of himself and his younger sister, Ycidra, or Cee, falls upon Frank's youthful shoulders, as his parents are overwhelmed by the demands of exploitative and underpaid labor (Morrison 50). The lack of guidance and positive male role models during his formative years profoundly impacts Frank's understanding of manhood (Morrison 50). Frank's premature initiation into adulthood is a consequence of the challenging circumstances he faces. With his parents working long hours, he is thrust into a position where he must assume adult responsibilities, providing for himself and protecting his sister (Morrison 51). This forced maturation denies Frank the experience of a carefree childhood or healthy adult role models. Instead, he must navigate the complexities of manhood in a racist and chauvinistic society with limited guidance. The absence of a nurturing male figure in Frank's life deprives him of the opportunity to witness positive examples of manhood and learn the experience of masculinity in a healthy context. Consequently, he is left to define manhood based on his own observations and the distorted messages perpetuated by a society entrenched in racism and gender stereotypes. Indeed, in her thought-provoking article, "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power:

Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's *Home,*" Katrina Harack examines the concept of double-consciousness and its influence on the perception of masculinity in African American men. Harack studies the painful dilemma faced by black men, who, as a result of societal pressures and the pervasive impact of racism, may adopt a white hegemonic perspective on masculinity (374). This adoption can lead to regressive treatment of women, as these men internalize and reproduce harmful gender dynamics that mirror those of the dominant culture (Harack 374). Morrison's portrayal of characters like Frank underlines this complex dynamic. The combination of his childhood deprivation, abusive familial environment, and exposure to societal biases shapes Frank's interpretation of manhood into a destructive one. His understanding becomes intertwined with notions of power, violence, and dominance, as he internalizes the oppressive ideals perpetuated by his surroundings. This damaging construction of manhood is manifested in his later behaviors and choices, leading to a self-destructive path that he must confront and navigate throughout the course of the novel.

The further analysis considers the profound impact of the abuse of Lenore, their step-grandmother, on Frank and Cee, shaping their respective trajectories and psychological states. Lenore's lack of interest and evident resentment towards her dependents establishes a relationship built solely on physical and verbal coercion (Morrison 52). As a result, Lenore becomes the initial source of violence in Frank's life, influencing his processing of situations and his subsequent actions, leading to permanent alterations in his brain and behavior (Morrison 52). One example of this is how Frank becomes overprotective of his younger sister Cee, a crucial characteristic that shapes the way he perceives women. When Frank and Cee visit farmland outside Lotus to look at horses, they unintentionally witness a black man being buried by white men (Morrison 17). The black man was brought to Lotus from Alabama along with his son (Morrison 141). They were

forced to fight to the death by white spectators, highlighting the brutal injustices and racial oppression that were tragically common during this period (Morrison 141). Frank recounts that he "hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it" (Morrison 17). Frank's role as a protective older brother is exemplified in his attempt to shield Cee from witnessing the traumatic burial scene (Morrison 17). However, this dynamic further shapes their psyches in distinct ways. Cee becomes reliant on her brother or other men for protection, denying herself agency and perpetuating her sense of powerlessness. On the other hand, Frank is burdened with the responsibility of safeguarding Cee, inhibiting his ability to confront and process his own emotions (Morrison 17). This leaves him unable to heal from the shared trauma they have experienced, as he constantly suppresses his feelings in order to fulfill his role as the protector. Frank's repression of his emotions and lack of opportunity for healing are exacerbated by the ongoing cycle of abuse and survival. The combination of being protective of Cee and enduring physical abuse from Lenore during his impressionable childhood leaves no space for genuine recovery. Frank remains in a constant state of distress, unable to address and heal from the deep scars inflicted upon him. Morrison's representation exposes the intergenerational cycle of violence and its lasting consequences on the characters' psyches. Or as Kolk argues: "it is very difficult for growing children to recover when the source of terror and pain is not enemy combatants but their own caretakers [and] that the quality of early caregiving is critically important in preventing mental health problems, independent of other traumas (32). Kolk's argument highlights the ways in which Frank and Cee's respective roles and experiences contribute to their development and shape their understanding of themselves and their place in the world (32). The trauma they endure, coupled with the absence of a nurturing environment, inhibits their ability to heal and creates a cyclical pattern of violence that persists

until Frank's adulthood. Also, Morrison's portrayal of Frank's relationship with his sister further emphasizes the theme of double-consciousness. Cee, too, has her own traumas and struggles as an African American woman, and her experiences represent the intersectionality of race and gender. Frank's efforts to protect and save Cee reflect his desire to shield her from the hardships and dangers of a world that he knows is not kind to people like them. This protective instinct stems from his understanding of the challenges they face due to their racial identity, further accentuating the dual consciousness that both siblings grapple with.

A. The Relationship Between Racism, Society, and War

Morrison's novel seeks to illuminate and confront the realities of the 1950s, a period characterized by anti-communist ideologies, an unacknowledged war, and pervasive racism. She accomplishes this through her exploration of war and society, which intertwines with the concept of manhood, presenting a nuanced perspective on the effects of conflict on male identity. Frank grapples with the psychological scars of combat and the societal expectations of manhood. The war becomes a transformative experience that challenges and distorts traditional notions of masculinity. As Frank confronts the horrors of war, he comprehends the fragility and vulnerability of his own sense of self (Morrison 100). The violence and trauma of the battlefield shatter the illusions of invincibility associated with manhood, leaving Frank emotionally wounded and searching for solace (Morrison 100). Morrison's depiction of war not only exposes the physical brutality of conflict but also delves into the psychological toll it takes on men, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of manhood in the face of violence and suffering (Morrison 100). Through Frank's journey, Morrison explores the paradoxical nature of manhood, where the expectations of strength and stoicism clash with the realities of war, ultimately challenging traditional notions of masculinity and inviting a deeper understanding of the human experience.

Nonetheless, Frank's post-war experiences sheds light on the harsh reality he faces upon returning from battle (Morrison 26). Or, as Mark Tabone argues: “black embodiment remains a site of profiling, violence, and dehumanization in the twenty-first century, as it was in the 1950s of Frantz Fanon” (299). Society and the government fail to recognize Frank’s emotional struggles and the evident symptoms of PTSD, leaving him to suffer in his psychologically wounded state (Morrison 21). This neglect amplifies his already profound trauma, exacerbating the challenges he must confront. In the hospital, a new battle ensues for Frank as he encounters a racist society that undermines his humanity and challenges his manhood. The racist gaze that Frank experiences upon returning from the war highlights the pervasive effects of discrimination in society and its dehumanizing impact on African Americans. As a war veteran, Frank should be celebrated for his service and sacrifice, but instead, his identity as a black man takes precedence over his accomplishments and struggles (Morrison 26). The racist gaze reduces him to a mere stereotype, reinforcing harmful racial prejudices and erasing the complexity of his individuality and experiences. In a racist society, the devaluation and marginalization of African Americans is evident in how they are perceived and treated (Morrison 26). The racist gaze perpetuates the notion that blacks are somehow inherently inferior or dangerous, denying them the recognition of their humanity and the right to be seen as unique individuals with their own stories and emotions (Wallowitz 154). This dehumanization denies Frank the opportunity to heal and move forward, as it invalidates his experiences and traumas, reducing them to insignificant or irrelevant in the eyes of society. Furthermore, the racist gaze serves as a barrier to empathy and understanding. Instead of providing support and recognition of Frank's pain and emotional scars from the war, society's racist perceptions further isolate him, making it difficult for him to express his vulnerabilities and seek help (Morrison 26). The lack of empathy exacerbates his emotional struggles, leaving him

feeling alienated and disconnected from those around him. Throughout the novel, Morrison portrays the consequences of the racist gaze on Frank's psyche and emotional well-being. His journey becomes an exploration of self-discovery and an attempt to reclaim his identity in a society that seeks to define him solely by his race. The racist gaze is an ever-present obstacle in his healing process, and it represents the broader systemic racism that African Americans face, making it challenging for them to find a sense of home, belonging, and healing in a society that constantly undermines their humanity. In order to assert his identity as a black man and defend his manhood, Frank is forced to resort to the only way he knows to react, which is being violent (Morrison 104). This desperate response reflects the accumulated effects of both childhood abuse and the horrors of war on his psyche. The violence that consumes Frank becomes a coping mechanism, a means to protect himself and assert his worth in a world that systematically devalues him. Morrison exposes the lasting impact of racialized inequality and the profound injustices faced by African American veterans. Frank's struggle emphasizes the interconnections between race, masculinity, and violence, illustrating how these complex dynamics perpetuate not only cycles of trauma but a sense of alienation. The fact that Frank is pushed to rely on violence to reclaim his identity and dignity further underscores the enduring consequences of childhood abuse and the war experience, which have reshaped his understanding of manhood and his place in society.

Additionally, Morrison depicts the internal conflicts he faces and the lack of a conducive environment for healing. Throughout the novel, Frank's violent outbursts and symptoms of depression are publicly exposed, possibly reflecting the overt manifestations of his internal turmoil. However, the more profound psychological and emotional battles he experiences remain hidden beneath the surface (Morrison 98). Morrison's depiction of Frank's internal struggles emphasizes the complexity of human emotions and the multifaceted nature of trauma. While some

of Frank's issues are apparent and observable, there are deeper layers of pain, trauma, and vulnerability that he keeps hidden from others (Morrison 98). This internalization of emotions might be due to societal expectations, cultural norms, or personal beliefs that discourage men, especially African American men in the 1950s, from expressing vulnerability or seeking help (Morrison 21). The absence of a true space for healing for Frank indicates a larger societal issue, where individuals facing mental and emotional challenges are not adequately supported or understood (Morrison 21). In the 1950s, mental health was often stigmatized and misunderstood, and seeking therapy or professional help for psychological issues was not as common as it is today (Morrison 20). As a result, Frank does not have access to appropriate resources or a supportive environment to address his internal struggles. Moreover, the racial and social context of the novel may further exacerbate Frank's inability to find a safe space for healing. Being an African American man in a racially segregated and discriminatory society, Frank faces additional barriers to seeking help. Discrimination and systemic oppression could contribute to a sense of isolation, making it even harder for him to express his emotions openly and seek support without fear of judgment or ridicule. Morrison's portrayal of Frank's internalized battles serves as a critique of a society that fails to provide adequate mental health support and understanding. By shining a light on the challenges faced by individuals like Frank, she draws attention to the importance of addressing mental health issues and providing spaces for healing and emotional well-being, which are often unattainable in a racist society.

B. Violence

Morrison provides a vivid portrayal of Frank's transformation, highlighting the psychological and emotional shifts he undergoes as a result of the war. During his time in the army, "Frank had not been brave before. He had simply done what he was told and what was necessary.

He even felt nervous after a kill. Now he was reckless, lunatic, firing, dogging the scattered parts of men. The begging, the howling for help he could not hear clearly until an F-51 dropped its load on the enemies' nest" (Morrison 101). The language used, such as "reckless" and "lunatic" (Morrison 101), conveys the intensity and chaos of the situation, emphasizing the disorientation and heightened emotions experienced in combat (Morrison 101). The mention of Frank feeling nervous after a kill suggests a complex mix of emotions, challenging the notion of bravery and underscoring the human toll of violence (Morrison 101). This quote showcases the psychological impact of war, illuminating the blurred boundaries between duty, bravery, and the disturbing realities of violence. Frank's transformation demonstrates that the violence that was once for duty has now become for revenge, reflecting that his deep unresolved emotions are dominating him (Morrison 101). An important domino effect that results from Frank's trauma is that the violence he endures is a violence he now inflicts on others, driving him to stay in this everlasting loop of trauma, not allowing himself to properly heal: "as Caruth and LaCapra would put it, he seems unable to move beyond that mental condition in which he simply acts out the disorientation and violence that have taken possession of the best part of his self" (Ibarrola 114). Frank's distressing and dangerous state is harmful not only to himself but the people around him, affecting them mentally, emotionally, or physically, revealing how his disruptive personality has repercussions on society. Lily, Frank's wife, is one of his casualties as she is not able to find peace and comfort within their relationship, which consequently intensifies their interpersonal conflicts:

> When she returned to the apartment, she was thankful to find it empty. How could he change so quickly? Laughing one second, terrified the next? Was there some violence in him that could be directed toward her? He had moods, of course, but was never argumentative or the least threatening. Lily drew up her knees and, with her elbows leaning

on them, pondered her confusion and his, the future she wanted and the question of whether he could share it. (Morrison 81)

While this passage demonstrates the extent to which Lily is affected and destabilized by Frank's behavior, it also reveals the disconnection between them (Morrison 81). Lily, having no sense of Frank's feelings, reflects the enormity of his alienation. While Frank and Lily are in the same place physically, they are at odds psychologically, which does not allow Frank to heal and does not allow Lily to progress in her life.

Morrison emphasizes the profound psychological impact of Frank's wartime experiences, as evidenced by the shifting response he exhibits when revisiting childhood memories. One of those memories is the one of the burial Frank and Cee witness, as Frank recalls: "in my little-boy heart I felt heroic and I knew that if they found us or touched her I would kill" (Morrison 107). Initially, when recalling the burial witnessed as a child, Frank's account does not include any mention of potential violence (Morrison 17). However, upon revisiting the memory, there is a marked change in his emotional response, projecting his present feelings onto the past (Morrison 107). This shift signifies the lasting effects of his time in war, as it has transformed him into a violent and detached adult. The change in Frank's response indicates a disconnection from reality, as he genuinely believes that, even as a young child, he could have killed men if necessary (Morrison 107). This highlights the extent of the psychological torture he has endured and the distorted perception of his own abilities and agency. Frank's identification with heroism and his willingness to resort to violence demonstrates the deep-seated trauma and the erosion of his innocence. Morrison's portrayal of Frank's transformation suggests that the brutalities of war have not only affected his behavior but also his understanding of his own capabilities and the world around him. The quote emphasizes the harrowing psychological toll of war, showcasing the ways

in which violence and trauma can shape one's perceptions and distort their sense of self (Morrison 107). It further accentuates the impact of Frank's wartime experiences, contributing to his present state of disconnectedness and diminished understanding of his own past.

C. Survivor's Guilt

Morrison stresses the complex and enduring nature of survivor's guilt, emphasizing its psychological toll on Frank. Frank grapples with acute survivor's guilt, a complex emotional burden resulting from the trauma he experienced during the war (Leys 61). The weight of this guilt is a central aspect of Frank's psychological journey, influencing his perceptions of self and his relationships with others. Survivor's guilt arises from the belief that one does not deserve to have survived a traumatic event while others perished (Leys 61). In Frank's case, he carries the guilt of having survived the war when many of his fellow soldiers did not (Morrison 100). This guilt is compounded by the fact that he witnessed the deaths of his comrades Mike and Stuff and was unable to save them (Morrison 100). Morrison presents Frank's survivor's guilt as a heavy burden that follows him back home, manifesting in a deep sense of shame and emotional turmoil. Throughout the novel, Frank wrestles with the question of why he survived and what makes him deserving of life when others were not as fortunate. This guilt colors his self-perception and contributes to a sense of unworthiness. Frank's guilt also impacts his relationships, as he struggles to connect with others and find solace in the aftermath of war (Morrison 23). The weight of his guilt isolates him, leading to a profound loneliness and alienation from those around him (Morrison 81). This guilt becomes a form of emotional imprisonment, inhibiting his ability to find peace and move forward in his life (Morrison 176). It serves as a constant reminder of the traumatic events he experienced and the lives lost, perpetuating a cycle of self-blame and inner torment. Frank's journey in the novel involves coming to terms with his survivor's guilt and finding a path towards

healing and self-forgiveness. It is a testament to Morrison's exploration of the profound emotional ramifications of war and the ways in which guilt can shape one's perception of themselves and the world around them.

Frank's survivor's guilt brings to the forefront the societal expectations of traditional masculinity, which often emphasizes stoicism, strength, and the ability to overcome emotional struggles. Frank's inability to fully reconcile his emotions and the traumatic memories he carries contradicts these conventional norms, leading to a sense of inadequacy and insecurity in his identity as a man. As Frank's journey progresses, he confronts the limitations of toxic masculinity and the damaging effects it has on his emotional well-being. He begins to question the traditional notions of manhood that prioritize emotional detachment and self-reliance, recognizing the need for vulnerability and emotional expression in his healing process (Morrison 176). He learns that embracing vulnerability and seeking emotional support is not a sign of weakness but a testament to strength and resilience (Morrison 133). In redefining his understanding of manhood, Frank embraces a more compassionate and emotionally aware version of himself.

Consciousness and Memories

Through Morrison's masterful prose, the reader becomes intimately connected to Frank's thoughts, emotions, and memories, gaining insight into the intricate workings of his consciousness. Frank's consciousness is skillfully represented through the novel's narrative structure, which alternates between first-person and third-person perspectives. This structural technique offers insight into Frank's internal world, his thoughts, and his evolving understanding of himself and the world around him, creating a connection between Frank and readers. The shift between first-person and third-person narration provides a unique lens into Frank's consciousness, giving readers a better understanding of Frank’s thought process. When the narrative is in first person, readers are

granted direct access to Frank's thoughts, emotions, and personal reflections (Morrison 136). This intimate perspective allows us to experience the story through Frank's own voice, enabling a deeper connection with his character and a more profound understanding of his internal struggles (Morrison 136). In addition, by applying this specific narrative structure, readers witness Frank's psychological progress as he continuously heals, which also serves as a confession (Morrison 136). Morrison using first-person perspective to dive into Frank's psyche suggests a form of journaling, demonstrating that Frank has the freedom of thinking and thoroughly remembering. Only when Morrison uses first-person perspective is Frank able to entirely express himself and explore his feelings, without others' judgments. Indeed, Morrison explores the internal gaze, where Frank engages in self-reflection and self-examination (174). Throughout the novel, Frank is enmeshed in a journey of self-discovery as he confronts his past traumas and faces his personal demons. The inner gaze allows him to question his own actions and motivations, leading to a deeper understanding of himself (Morrison 136). Morrison seeks to bridge the gap between conscious and unconscious thought. The subconscious is often associated with a realm beyond linguistic expression, where emotions and impressions are not easily put into words. Through her narrative technique, Morrison aims to translate these unspoken elements into a tangible and relatable form, making the previously elusive aspects of the characters' experiences more accessible to readers (Montgomery 326). Morrison's narrative approach fosters a sense of intimacy and connection between Frank and readers. As they bear witness to his journey, readers become part of the healing process, sharing his struggles and eventual growth. This sense of conversation and shared experience deepens the emotional impact of the novel, making it a powerful exploration of trauma, resilience, and healing.

Conversely, the third-person perspective provides a broader view of Frank's experiences, enabling readers to observe him from an external vantage point. This narrative distance allows for a more objective examination of Frank's actions, interactions with others, and the impact he has on those around him. It also serves to highlight the complexities of his character and the dichotomy between his internal thoughts and the way he presents himself to the world. The alternating narrative perspectives mirror the layers of Frank's consciousness, revealing his inner thoughts and conflicts while also presenting an external representation of his behavior. This dynamic structure enhances the reader's engagement with Frank's character, as we witness the tensions between his public persona and his private struggles. Through the interplay of first-person and third-person narration, Morrison invites readers to delve into Frank's perceptions, experiencing the intricacies of his thought processes, his emotional turmoil, and his journey of self-discovery. The narrative structure becomes a powerful tool in illuminating the depths of Frank's psyche and offering a multi-dimensional understanding of his character.

Memory, another integral aspect of consciousness, also occupies a central position in *Home.* Morrison presents memory as a subjective and malleable force, capable of shaping one's understanding of self and influencing present-day perceptions. Frank's memories of his childhood, his sister, Cee, and the horrors of war all converge within his consciousness, shaping his present actions and choices. Morrison invites readers to contemplate the relationship between memory and awareness, raising questions about their intersection. Memories are not mere recollections of the past but are intertwined with the characters' identities and the shaping of their present lives. Morrison explores how memories, particularly traumatic ones, impact an individual's perception of themselves and their place in the world.

Furthermore, Morrison effectively utilizes memories and the present to immerse readers in the historical context of Frank's story and evoke a sense of living the moments as if they were their own (Montgomery 326). By drawing upon the memories of the characters and blending them with the present narrative, Morrison creates a vivid and immersive experience for readers, allowing them to intimately connect with the historical setting of the 1950s. Morrison's incorporation of memories acts as a bridge between the past and the present, enabling readers to gain insights into the characters' personal histories and the broader social and cultural climate of the 1950s (Morrison 21). Through the characters' recollections, readers are transported to that particular era, experiencing the joys, challenges, and struggles of the time period. By intertwining memories with the present narrative, Morrison creates a multi-dimensional understanding of the characters and their lived experiences, which in turn allows readers to become active participants in the historical context. Moreover, her deliberate decision not to explicitly identify characters as categorically black or white enhances the immersive experience for readers. By leaving the racial categorizations open-ended, she encourages readers to imagine and visualize the characters in their own minds. This technique enables readers to transcend racial boundaries and biases, fostering a deeper connection with the characters and their stories. It allows readers to project themselves onto the characters, irrespective of their own racial or ethnic backgrounds, and creates a more universal and relatable reading experience. By immersing readers in the story, Morrison empowers her audience to actively engage with the historical context and participate in the narrative. This technique invites readers to reflect on their own understanding of history, identity, and empathy, while also challenging preconceived notions and stereotypes. It contributes to Morrison's broader project of fostering a sense of collective memory and shared humanity, regardless of individual backgrounds or identities.

A crucial memory that Frank revisits when readers have access to his consciousness is the one with the Korean girl. Frank's consciousness pushes him into confronting this memory twice, enabling him to face his traumas and hold himself accountable (Morrison 176). When Frank first visits this memory, he does not show any form of responsibility as he completely separates himself from the situation: "thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill" (Morrison 98). However, while not admitting it was he who murdered the child, his subconscious begins the process of holding himself accountable as he describes his feelings at that moment (Morrison 98). Frank's feeling "more than disgust" (Morrison 98) both demonstrates his trauma and humanizes him. When Frank visits the same memory for the second time, he finally admits to his violent crime: "I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched. I am the one who saw her smile. I am the one she said 'Yum-yum' to. I am the one she aroused. A child. A wee little girl" (Morrison 136). The way Morrison has written Frank's confession, by way of utilizing repetition of "I" (Morrison 136) for every sentence, shows that Frank admits his culpability (Morrison 136). This process shows his accountability for his actions, which reveals an extremely dark truth about himself and exposes his disturbed psyche. Frank is entirely vulnerable, which seems to come from his willingness to heal and his moral injury (Morrison 136). Moral injury refers to the psychological and emotional distress that arises from the violation of deeply held moral beliefs and values, often resulting from participation in actions or situations that contradict one's ethical principles, especially in situations involving war, trauma, or morally challenging circumstances (Kinghorn 60). In this case, Frank's moral injury becomes a driving force in his journey. He seeks redemption and a way to heal from the trauma of war and the burden of the lives he took. This quest for healing and redemption leads him on a physical and emotional journey to rescue Cee. From the first-time readers are exposed to this memory to the

second time, Frank has transformed, reflecting his emotional maturation. This trajectory indicates that he is facing his traumas and crimes; only then can he truly begin the process of healing.

Morrison deftly portrays Frank's healing journey by showcasing the transformative power of revisiting memories. Through Frank's first-person narrative, Morrison enables him to confront and process his traumas, ultimately leading to a shift in his understanding of manhood and a sense of peace in his own story (Morrison 136). Frank's memories serve as a portal to his past, allowing him to relive the moments of trauma and pain that he had previously suppressed or could not fully process. The act of revisiting these memories brings them to the forefront of his consciousness, forcing him to face them directly. This process can be challenging and emotionally overwhelming, as it demands that he confront his suppressed emotions and come to terms with the impact these experiences had on him (Morrison 136). Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that when Frank experienced his traumas, he went into a survival mode, possibly to protect himself from the overwhelming emotions and distress associated with those events. As a result, he did not fully digest or process these traumas at the time they occurred. However, the first-person narrative employed by Morrison gives Frank the opportunity to revisit and reevaluate these events from a more mature and reflective perspective. The first-person narrative serves as a medium for Frank to communicate with himself and readers, allowing him to articulate his thoughts, feelings, and emotions in a way that might not have been possible before. By sharing his story in his own words, Frank engages in a conversation with his past self and readers, leading to a deeper understanding of his experiences and their lasting impact. In this process of revisiting and acknowledging his recollections, Frank discovers a sense of agency and empowerment. By reclaiming his narrative and articulating his feelings, he regains control over his own story and is no longer defined solely

by his traumas. This newfound agency contributes to his healing journey, allowing him to reshape his understanding of manhood.

Cee and Womanhood

Cee's upbringing by her step-grandmother, Lenore, significantly impacts her psychologically, contributing to her vulnerability and struggles throughout the narrative. Lenore's care for Cee is rooted in a sense of duty rather than genuine affection, leading to emotional neglect and a lack of emotional support during the younger woman's formative years (Morrison 51). This emotional deprivation deeply affects Cee's sense of self-worth, autonomy, and ability to cope with adversity. Lenore's actions are driven more by societal expectations and familial obligations, leaving Cee without the nurturing and emotional support crucial for healthy psychological development (Morrison 51). Indeed, Lenore's expression of her feelings towards Cee, a child she considered to be " born in the street - or the gutter, as she usually put it - was prelude to a sinful, worthless life" (Morrison 51), establishes the tone for how Cee perceives herself, behaves, and is treated, as she is raised with the belief that she is unworthy. As Kolk argues:

> [A]s children, we start off at the center of our own universe, where we interpret everything that happens from an egocentric vantage point. If our parents or grandparents keep telling us we're the cutest, most delicious thing in the world, we don't question their judgment—we must be exactly that. And deep down, no matter what else we learn about ourselves, we will carry that sense with us: that we are basically adorable. As a result, if we later hook up with somebody who treats us badly, we will be outraged. (145)

Kolk's argument is precisely what happens to Cee (145). As children, we have not psychologically developed enough to question what our parents or caregivers say about us, having immense psychological and emotional effects (Kolk 145). The emotional neglect that Cee experiences under

Lenore's care contributes to her feelings of abandonment and insecurity. As a child, she is denied the emotional validation and support necessary for building a strong sense of self (Morrison 51). This emotional emptiness leads to a lack of confidence and an inability to develop healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with life's challenges, setting the stage for her vulnerability as an adult. Moreover, Cee's upbringing under Lenore influences her relationship patterns. The absence of emotional warmth and intimacy during her childhood led Cee to seek emotional fulfillment and validation in her romantic relationship, which was as toxic as her "relationship" with Lenore. Her vulnerability in seeking such connections exposes her to exploitative and harmful relationships, such as the one she finds herself in with Dr Beauregard (Morrison 69). Cee's lack of emotional support from Lenore contributes to her predisposition to manipulation and exploitation. Her vulnerability leaves her more susceptible to falling prey to the allure of Dr. Beauregard's appeal; she thus seeks solace and belonging in a misguided attempt to fill the emotional void she experienced growing up. The void created during her upbringing leaves her searching for affirmation and purpose, which ultimately leads her down a dangerous path, showcasing the psychological effects Lenore has caused and the importance of a healthy upbringing.

Cee's exposure to eugenics and her subsequent physical and emotional trauma demonstrates the dehumanization and disregard for the lives of African Americans that were perpetuated by eugenics. Cee's experience of eugenics and its aftermath serves as a powerful critique of the patriarchal system that perpetuates such forms of oppression. The novel challenges the dehumanizing treatment of women and calls for a recognition of their agency and worth beyond society's patriarchal norms. This experience reveals the systemic racism and exploitation embedded in the ideology, as Cee and other members of the black community were used as test subjects without their informed consent or consideration for their well-being (Morrison 68). By

incorporating the theme of eugenics into the novel, Morrison shines a light on the historical atrocities committed against marginalized communities under the guise of scientific progress (68). She exposes the dehumanizing effects of such ideologies and how they perpetuated systemic racism and discrimination (Morrison 68). Morrison emphasizes the profound impact of race, gender, age, and educational background on individuals, revealing the constraints they impose and the implications of living within these societal boundaries (Harack 387). Through her portrayal of these intersecting factors, Morrison establishes a correlation between the physical body and one's identity, highlighting how external markers shape and define an individual's sense of self and place in society. Through Cee's character, Morrison also explores the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals in the face of such oppressive systems. Despite the trauma and exploitation she experiences, Cee embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment and strives to reclaim her autonomy and identity.

Through the exploration of sisterhood and female bonds back in Lotus, Morrison celebrates the resilience and strength of women in the face of adversity. Morrison presents women as powerful healers who possess a deep understanding of natural remedies and the benefits of emotional support (122). The women in Lotus demonstrate their ability to nurture and care for one another, creating an affirming environment where healing can take place (Morrison 122). Their collective knowledge and experiences empower them to provide effective care for Cee and challenge the notion that healing should only come from male-dominated institutions (Morrison 122). The novel challenges the traditional perception of women, particularly mothers, as weak or dependent. Despite not having formal education or access to institutional knowledge, these women showcase a different kind of strength that comes from their lived experiences and intuitive understanding of the human condition (Morrison 122). Their wisdom and ability to heal are

grounded in the practical knowledge passed down through generations (Morrison 126). The novel accentuates the value of intergenerational knowledge and how it can be a potent source of healing (Morrison 126). The women in Lotus draw upon their shared experiences and the wisdom passed down through their communities to create healing recipes and provide emotional support to one another (Morrison 126). This emphasizes the importance of preserving and transmitting such knowledge, as it has the power to sustain and heal communities. Morrison also explores the impact of men's presence on the healing process, as exemplified by the decision to keep Frank away from Cee's bedside (Morrison 126). This suggests that the women believe his maleness might hinder Cee's healing, pointing to a contrasting view of male and female energies in the context of healing (Morrison 122). It demonstrates the importance of a nurturing and empathetic approach that women can provide, especially in the face of the aggressive techniques of a patriarchal medical industry. The novel contrasts the healing practices of women, which are grounded in nature and community, with the aggressive and dehumanizing techniques of a patriarchal industry that seeks to control and manipulate bodies. This comparison highlights the inherent value and efficacy of alternative community-based healing methods that prioritize empathy, care, and intergenerational knowledge. The support and understanding they provide one another demonstrate the transformative power of unity and compassion. Miss Ethel and the other women become symbols of hope and possibility, where women can redefine their roles in society and find empowerment in their shared journey towards healing and self-discovery.

The Role of Community

Community plays a central role in shaping the characters' experiences and providing a sense of belonging, support, and identity. Through her portrayal of community, Morrison underlines the intricacies of human connections, the power of shared experiences, and the potential

for healing and transformation. The novel explores the concept of community as a source of both comfort and constraint. The characters find solace and understanding within their respective communities, but they also grapple with the expectations and limitations imposed by communal norms and traditions. Morrison highlights the significance of communal bonds in times of adversity (Morrison 25). When Frank embarks on a journey to rescue his sister, all along the way, he encounters various communities that offer him assistance, guidance, and companionship. These connections become crucial in Frank's healing process, as he confronts his traumas and seeks redemption. Indeed, the connections and support Frank receives from the black community throughout his journey are pivotal to his success in reuniting with Cee. The novel emphasizes the significance of close friends and community bonds, showing how they provide a crucial lifeline for Frank as he faces numerous challenges. The black community plays a vital role in Frank's physical journey as he navigates through various locations to reach his sister. They offer him shelter, food, and guidance, showing the strength of communal ties and the willingness to help one another in times of need (Morrison 25). These connections create a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity that aids Frank in overcoming the obstacles in his path. Beyond the practical assistance, the black community also contributes to Frank's mental and emotional journey. Their empathy and shared experiences allow Frank to confront his past traumas and come to terms with his personal demons. He finds a sense of belonging and understanding among those who have faced similar struggles, enabling him to process his emotions and find healing along the way. Moreover, the black community's support and validation serve to counteract the detrimental effects of racism and discrimination that Frank has experienced throughout his life. In a racially oppressive society, the black community becomes a sanctuary where he can regain his sense of identity and agency, free from the judgments and prejudices of the outside world. The novel

explores the resilience and strength of the black community, showcasing how it serves as a refuge and source of empowerment for its members. Through their collective efforts, the community helps Frank rediscover his purpose and regain his self-worth, allowing him to navigate his way back to his sister and find redemption in the process.

Additionally, *Home* investigates the role of community in shaping personal identity. The cultural and historical context of the African American community in the 1950s is central to the characters' experiences and perceptions of themselves. The shared history of racial oppression and the struggle for equality contribute to a shared sense of identity and resilience within the African American community depicted in the novel (Morrison 25). Through her nuanced exploration of community dynamics, Morrison captures the essence of human relationships and the importance of finding a sense of belonging and purpose in a changing and often unjust world.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Home* masterfully navigate the intricate landscapes of racial oppression, trauma, and the quest for self-identity, intertwining these themes with the contrasting trajectories of healing and the indispensable role of community support. *The Bluest Eye* serves as a seminal work that established Morrison's unique voice, delving unapologetically into the complexities of internalized racism, beauty standards, and the profound psychological wounds inflicted upon black individuals. The characters' harrowing struggles to conform to an imposed notion of beauty underscores the profound damage inflicted by generations of historical trauma. The novel's lack of a redemptive arc mirrors the cyclical nature of this pain, vividly portraying how the weight of history shapes individuals' sense of self and worth.

Conversely, in *Home*, Morrison crafts a narrative of resilience and renewal, echoing the evolution of her literary career. Through the protagonists Frank and Cee, Morrison introduces the potential for healing through community connection. Their journey back to their origins becomes symbolic of a return to their cultural and personal roots, fostering a process of reconciliation and personal growth. The novel accentuates the pivotal role of solidarity and communal bonds in countering the weight of adversity. Morrison's storytelling acumen is on full display as she transforms the pages into a testament of the transformative power of unity in the face of entrenched systemic struggles.

Furthermore, through her exploration of shifting gender roles and evolving feminine power in *Home*, Morrison encourages a nuanced understanding of masculinity and emphasizes the need for African American men to resist the allure of white hegemonic ideals. By dismantling regressive gender dynamics and embracing a more progressive perspective, Morrison's characters and the

novel as a whole offer a space for reimagining and redefining notions of masculinity that are rooted in respect, equality, and empowerment for all.

Across both novels, Morrison's overarching accomplishment is twofold. Firstly, she intricately unpacks the multilayered impacts of systemic oppression on individuals and communities, showcasing the nuanced ways it shapes their identities and outlooks. Secondly, by weaving threads of resilience and camaraderie, she underscores the capacity for individuals to navigate these adversities and reimagine their narratives. Morrison's works, spanning from the stark portrayal of enduring pain in *The Bluest Eye* to the more nuanced tapestry of healing in *Home*, beckon readers to reflect on the timeless echoes of history while inspiring hope for a future defined by empathy, transformation, and communal strength. In essence, Morrison's literary legacy in these novels encapsulates the breadth of human experience, serving as both a mirror to society's ills and a beacon guiding us toward healing and progress.

Together, these novels trace a trajectory that mirrors Morrison's own life journey and intellectual growth. From confronting the harsh realities of systemic racism and its impact on individual psyches to exploring avenues of healing and rebuilding within the embrace of community, Morrison's work offers a holistic examination of the complexities inherent in the black experience. As bookends to her career, *The Bluest Eye* and *Home* demonstrate Morrison's profound ability to weave together literary artistry and thought-provoking themes. They stand as a testament to her commitment to amplifying marginalized voices, engaging with historical legacies, and inviting readers into a contemplative dialogue about the enduring challenges and resilient spirit of the African American community.

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