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“Identity Crisis in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*
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Do I dare disturb the universe?

T.S. Eliot - Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to identify what Toni Morrison achieves in her novel by materializing the conflict of the self against the Other and its effect as a social statement. To answer this question, I want to examine images of African American women, analyzing what stereotypes defined them, and how Toni Morrison has opened possibilities in her novels for African American women to be able to reclaim their identities. I have chosen Toni Morrison because I find her to be extraordinary in her depictions of African American life. The reason why I have chosen *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* is because these two texts are Toni Morrison's first two novels, written during the era of the movement of 'Black is Beautiful,' and carry the strongest political statements referring to the depiction of African American women.

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio¹ in 1931 to parents whose families had migrated North in search of opportunity. Morrison grew up in Ohio and began her literary career in 1970 with her publication of *The Bluest Eye*. Before becoming an author, Morrison supported her family by working as a text editor for Random House.² During this time Morrison promoted fiction written by prominent African Americans:

Morrison's work as an editor contributed to African American literature in two ways. First she was influential in publishing many other black writers. In addition to editing her textbooks, she edited novels by Gayle Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and John McCluskey; and autobiographies by the boxer Muhammad Ali and the politician Andrew Young. Her editing work thus helped to shape the tradition of African American literature. Second, her editing work brought her into contact with materials that she used as imaginative starting points in her novels. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 4)

Toni Morrison began writing her novels in the politically charged 1970s when the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement were in full effect. Influenced

¹ Lorain, Ohio is the town in which *The Bluest Eye* is set.

² Cf. Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 4

by the need for African American women's authorship, Morrison wrote novels which nakedly describe African American communities. However, she "resist[ed] political demands that she write on particular subjects, or about particular subjects in particular ways. Morrison considers her books to be political statements. In her view, the aesthetic of "art for art's sake"- literature with no social purpose is useless" (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 7). Toni Morrison politicizes her novels with the subject matter she chooses and in the way she refuses to follow general trends in authorship.

The primary focus of many African American women authors right before and during the 1970s was to move the image of the African American woman from the borders of marginalization to the center stage. Toni Morrison proves this in her conversation with Christina Davis, "[...] in the beginning [of her writing] I was just interested in *finally* placing black women center stage in the text" (Davis "An Interview with Toni Morrison" 231). Morrison's characters, Pecola and Claudia, are the novel's primary focus. Pecola is the image of the bruised and battered protagonist while Claudia functions as the narrator who retells her story. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek writes:

The novel develops the emotional rationale for some of the cultural changes sought by the political movements of the 1960s. Activists called for black dolls, for example, to help African American children build self-esteem. The "Black is beautiful" movement enlarged this idea, advocating pride in black skin and African or African American features. In *The Bluest Eye*, the absence of black dolls-and the inescapable presence of white ones-is presented as a part of what makes Pecola, feel invisible. Further, the novel presents the emotional consequence of identifying ugliness with blackness, and clearly shows that too many beautiful, unique black children are destroyed by racist aesthetics. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison A Critical Companion* 30)

In retelling Pecola's story, Claudia gives a voice to a girl who never has one. Pecola is forced into crisis and subsequent madness, because she will never be seen in her society as beautiful. Pecola's community neglects her because she does not fit into

their ideal image of beauty. Alone and marginalized, Pecola falls apart because of her isolation.

Starting with the title of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the reader is clued into what Pecola's society deems as beautiful. They see Shirley Temple's golden locks, blue eyes, and pale skin as an image of perfection.³ Shirley Temple is the girl who can do no wrong because, according to the skewed gaze of her community, she is the epitome of what they strive to look like and become. Each member of the African American community in Lorain struggles to become like Shirley Temple in his/her own way. They do not recognize how destructive the force of false images of beauty, imposed on each other, can be in a community.

To counteract the destructive imagery of Shirley Temple and other White images of beauty, African American women, during the 1960s, promoted the idea of 'Black is Beautiful.' The concept behind the 'Black is Beautiful' movement was to encourage images of African American women to reflect the characteristics of African American women and how they truly were. However, in recounting the lives of African American women, Morrison adhered to the notion that their identity is problematic and cannot be clearly defined. In her book *Folklore and Fiction*, Trudier Harris argues, "Morrison said that she felt it necessary, amidst all the 'Black Is Beautiful' rhetoric of the 1960s, to develop a story in which all the problems confronting black people were not solved" (Harris *Fiction and Folklore* 17). The ending of *The Bluest Eye* leaves the reader unsettled. There is no resolution that ties up the novel in a neat package; there is, however, a brutal reflection on African American society.

Moving onto Morrison's second novel, *Sula* is a story that centers itself on a friendship between two women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, and the bond they form. In describing this novel, Kubitschek writes:

³ Cf. Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 30.

Sula also examines females identity, but with less vulnerable heroines. Whereas Pecola's isolation leads her to doom, Sula Peace and Nel Wright live in stable families and form a friendship that supports their growth into womanhood. In addition, Morrison's examination of the environment for this friendship, the black community, is much more nuanced and complex than in *The Bluest Eye*. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 47)

The novel is set in the African American town of the Bottom. The Bottom was originally founded because an African American slave was conned by a White slave owner into believing that the location of the town would be profitable. However, as with anything planted in the poor soil in the Bottom, the African American community struggles to survive.

The women of the Peace family confront the members of the Bottom and challenge the traditional values of their community. This woman-headed household, through three generations of women (Eva, Hannah, and Sula), embraces sexuality and independence, two attributes that women should not have according to the community in the Bottom, during the period between World War I and World War II. The main perpetrator of rebellion, in the Bottom, is Sula Peace. She brazenly defies her community and its insistence that she 'behave' and consequently they cast her out from her community. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek explains that the retribution the Bottom experiences is a result of expelling one of its members:

But whereas *The Bluest Eye* shows the scapegoat destroyed by this process, *Sula* shows that when a community rejects one of its own members, it destroys itself. The least self-reliant, least vital members of the community celebrate Sula's physical death as though it were also her spiritual annihilation. Their victory is short-lived and their spiritual notions shallow: they perish in the tunnel collapse when Sula's spirit survives to inspire Nel. As a community, the Bottom too perishes, though self-reliant individuals survive. So do those with the potential to reclaim themselves, like Nel. And so does the spirit of female independence: Sula. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison A Critical Companion* 70)

The main statement Morrison makes in this novel is that an African American community needs to bond together for it to succeed. If it does not, it is doomed to fall apart and die.

In my thesis, I will analyze both novels and I will show how Morrison emphasizes the topics of identity and community through the depiction of events that unfold in Lorain, Ohio and the Bottom. I argue that what makes Morrison unique in her authorship is her writing technique and the subjects about which she chooses to write. I want to show how Toni Morrison, in her novels, creates a platform on which African American women can reclaim their identity.

2. Identity and the African American Women's Movement

2.1 The Importance of Identity in Toni Morrison's Fiction

Having an individual identity⁴ is important when a person relates to a group.⁵ A loss of identity or identity crisis arises when a person, because of his/her interactions with a group, is left without a positive image of him/her. As I will show African American women have been devoid of positive images of themselves because of their interactions with dominant groups that tried to suppress African American women. To understand how negative images of African American women developed and how this pertains to Morrison's fiction, we have to understand how individual identities are developed and destroyed.

⁴ As is described in *New Keywords*: "[An] identity is to do with the imagined sameness of a person or of a social group at all times and in all circumstances; about a person or a group being, and being able to continue to be, itself and not someone or something else [...] The question of identity centers on the assertion of principles of unity, as opposed to pluralism and diversity, and of continuity, as opposed to change and transformation [...] An identity has no clear positive meaning, but derives its distinction from what it is not, from what it excludes, from its position in the field of difference" (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris *New Keywords* 172).

⁵ The group, in this example, is a person's community with whom the individual interacts and the members of the community who influence mainstream thoughts for the community to follow. Often the group is comprised of the dominant and powerful members of a community and the people who chose to follow their doctrines.

Throughout history, individuals have striven to obtain a unique identity for themselves, which has led them to be motivated to perform a number of expected and unexpected behaviors. In his book *Identity in Modern Society*, Bernd Simon states, “Identity is fashionable. Everyone wants to have one, many promise to provide one” (Simon *Identity in Modern Society* 1). Sociologists, psychologists, and cultural studies theorists, I am assured, would argue that how we form our identity is a leading preoccupation for many people today. Simon argues:

In any case, the general popularity of (notion of) identity suggests that most people, irrespective of their hopes or fears, are fascinated by identity and what it does to and for themselves and others. For example, most of us would agree that identity is responsible for how we feel about ourselves and that a lack of identity or an identity crisis jeopardizes our well-being or even our physical existence. Also, identity is thought to underlie much, if not all, of our behavior. (Simon *Identity in Modern Society* 1)

Identity plays a crucial part in our understanding of who we are and who we are not. Many of us spend a great amount of energy creating our own identity and this search for identity motivates our behavior. We use our appearance, intellect, and social status as measurements to define our identity. How we form an identity depends strongly on our interactions with others in our community. Simon writes:

Having a collective place as a group as well as one’s own individual place in the group was and still is crucial for survival. Like other social animals, people could not exist as isolated individuals because survival, both as a species and as an individual, requires coordination and often cooperative action. (Simon *Identity in Modern Society* 11)

An individual’s identity can be determined through his/her relationship with his/her community. As I want to show in my analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, where one is situated in a community has an impact on how that person creates his/her identity and engages in social interactions.

Individual identity is recognition of who we are and what we constitute. How we devise our identity relies heavily on how we perceive ourselves as individuals and

how we interact with others in our community. Cultural identity is the identity of a group or how a group influences an individual. Crises of identity arise when we cannot construct a positive self-image of ourselves alone or within a community. In the case of African American women, a crisis can arise because these women have been historically denied a positive self-image by society and even within their own communities. In *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* this denial of a positive self-image and crisis is an often re-visited theme by the author, Toni Morrison. A discussion of identity in a true and all encompassing argument would take longer than the pages of this thesis would permit. For the sake of brevity, I want to limit my discussion of identity to arguments presented in Stuart Hall's book *Questions of Cultural Identity* and Michel's Foucault's essay "Subject and Power."

2.2 The Construction of Identity According to the Self and the Other

The first step towards constructing an identity is determining what should be included in the self⁶ and excluded as the 'Other.'⁷ The self is the positive aspect of our identity and the 'Other' is the negative aspect. The distinction between the self and the 'Other' is not a simple binary because there is a symbiosis between these two concepts. In his book *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall describes how identities are constructed:

[...] Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other,

⁶ "In psychology it [the self] is often used for [a] set of attributes that a person attaches to himself or herself most firmly, the attributes that the person finds it difficult or impossible to imagine himself or herself without [...] In philosophy, the self is the agent, the knower and the ultimate locus of personal identity" (John Perry <<http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~jperry/PHILPAPERS/self-enc.pdf>> 22 Oct. 2008).

⁷ In *New Keywords* there is a discussion of what the Other constitutes, "Identities are constituted out of the play of difference, on the basis, that is to say, of their difference from other identities, assuming their positive meaning through what they exclude. The other is what eludes our consciousness and knowing, and it is what resides outside the sphere of "our" culture and community. It is the non-self and the non-us" (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris *New Keywords* 249).

the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks [...] Throughout their careers, identities function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capability to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside' abjected. Every identity has at its 'margin,' an excess, something more. (Hall *Questions of Cultural Identity* 4-5)

To determine the self requires recognition of the 'Other,' for example, what is positive can only be established in comparison with what is negative, therefore what is negative cannot be completely disregarded. Often, when we construct our identities, we try to exclude negative aspects. It is in the act of exclusion⁸ that we marginalize and push away that which we believe to be harmful to our self. In his book *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall refers to an argument put forward by Judith Butler:

[...] Butler makes a powerful case that all identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects, apparently outside the field of the symbolic, the representable – 'the production of an "outside", a domain of intelligible effects' (1993:22) – which then returns to trouble and unsettle the foreclosure which we prematurely call 'identities.' (Hall *Questions of Cultural Identity* 15)

As I have established, the construction of one's identity is an interplay in which we define what we are by what we are not. The dividing line, between what we are and what we are not, is malleable and can change when we further develop our identities. This malleability is unsettling, for what we might have previously considered outside or marginalized from our identity, can now become included.

Many questions arise when we construct an identity and what we choose to include as the self or exclude as the Other as the self: Who has the authority to determine what encompasses the self and what marginalizes the Other? Where do we find the images of the Other? What do we expel from the self and place in the location of the Other? And in what context do we find the image of the Other? These questions aid us in our understanding of what constitutes the Other and what we use as

⁸ This act of exclusion, as described in *New Keywords*, is also termed, "Othering: In the process of othering, feelings of rage, hostility, and hatred are projected onto what are regarded as dangerously alien persons or cultures" (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris *New Keywords* 249).

the yardstick for its measurement. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, the image of the Other is embodied in the character of Pecola. To answer the aforementioned questions: The African American community in Lorain marginalizes Pecola, she is the image of the Other, the community expels anything in their image that could tie them to Pecola's ugliness, and her African American community is the context for her 'othering.'

A community creates a concept of the Other in order to reaffirm its identity. However, when the definition of the Other cannot be easily established, the concept of self is threatened and becomes ambiguous. Often this ambiguity will lead to a more aggravated attempt to vehemently define the Other and create a scapegoat in which all the characteristics of the Other can reside. As I established earlier, identity is important to an individual's perception of the self and if this identity is challenged, the principles on which the individual identity is founded are questioned. If there is crisis within the individuals of the community, there will be crisis within the community as a whole.

As I will examine further, in my analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Morrison lessens the definitive division between the self and the Other, what one is and what one is not, in an attempt to create a more fluid connection between the self and the Other. A way in which she creates fluidity between the self and the Other is through her revision of the dominant gaze.⁹ As I will discuss later, the dominant racialized gaze was imposed on African American women to render them powerless.

⁹ The dominant gaze can be surmised as the gaze that the dominant group in the community imposes on the minority group. A more comprehensive description of the dominant and racialized gaze is presented in the following chapter entitled "Foucault and Subjectivity."

2.3 Foucault and Subjectivity

The definition of subjectivity¹⁰ constitutes the main objective in my thesis. In essence, subjectivity encompasses the question of how a person is removed from the location as the definitive *subject*¹¹ to a more fluid construct through discourse. To aid in my understanding of the process of subjectivity, I want to employ Michel Foucault's ideas concerning subjectivity in his essay "The Subject and Power." At first, Foucault writes in his essay "The Subject and Power," "My objective [...] has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault "The Subject and Power" 777). Foucault states that there are different methods by which the Other in a society is created. One of these methods Foucault terms 'objectifying:' "The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectifies him" (Foucault "Subject and Power" 777). I argue then that the Other is a divided entity and consequently the Other is created when a person is separated from other people in a community. The separation of a person from a group or a community is part of what defines that individual as an Other because that individual is denied access to the group because of his/her position as an outsider.

In my understanding of Foucault, he redefines the 'traditional subject' into a more fluid concept through the use of discourse.¹² In *Representation* Hall writes:

¹⁰ In his book *Cultural Studies*, Chris Barker describes Subjectivity as thus, "Subjectivity is the condition and process of being a person or self. For cultural studies, subjectivity is often regarded, after Foucault, as an 'effect' if discourse because subjectivity is constituted by the subject positions which discourse obliges us to take up." (Barker *Cultural Studies* 392).

¹¹ To assist in my understanding of the 'traditional subject,' I refer to Stuart Hall's definition in his book *Representation*, "The conventional notion think of 'the subject' as an individual who is fully endowed with consciousness; an autonomous and stable entity, the 'core' of the self, and the independent, authentic source of action and meaning [...] Foucault's most radical propositions: the 'subject' is produced *within discourse*" (Hall *Representation* 55).

¹²In their book *Cultural Theory*, Riley and Smith describe discourse, "Discourse is perhaps the central motif in Foucault's thinking. A discourse can be thought of as a way of describing, defining, classifying, and thinking about people, things, and even knowledge and abstract systems of thought. Foucault argued that discourses were never free of power relations. Nor should they be understood as the products of sovereign, creative human minds (as the humanist tradition maintained). To the

Foucault's 'subject' seems to be produced through discourse in *two* different senses or places. First, the discourse itself produces 'subjects' – figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge that the discourse produces. These subjects have the attributes we would expect as these are defined by the discourse [...] But the discourse also produces a *place for the subject* from which its particular knowledge and meaning most makes sense. (Hall *Representation* 56)

Foucault creates subject placement through discourse. Accordingly, the discourse produced by Morrison's novels re-envision traditional perceptions of African American women and produces a more fluid identity for them. One way in which fluid identity, for the image of the African American woman, was prevented was through the racialized gaze imposed upon her. In his book *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*, Peter Brooker writes, "His [Foucault's] use of this term [gaze] carries the sense of being objectified, subordinated or threatened by the look of another" (Brooker *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (no page number)). The gaze is then a tool used to render the object gazed upon (in my thesis the African American woman) less powerful. I argue that Morrison, through her novels, creates discourse that 'redirects the gaze.' Redirection of the gaze occurs when the dominant group is forced to reassess its position of power after looking at itself outside of the position of power. To clarify this point let us analyze the following quote from Foucault in his essay "Subject and Power:"

[...] go[ing] further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point [...] Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power through the antagonism of strategies. (Foucault "Subject and Power" 780)

One way in which we reevaluate a dominant or racialized gaze is by stepping outside of that viewpoint and seeing in which historical context this gaze was created.

contrary, they are implicated and arise out of the power/knowledge relationships between the groups of people that the discourses themselves constitute and regulate" (Riley and Smith *Cultural Theory* 116).

Resisting the urge to use the dominant gaze gives us the option to reassess what is powerful and what is not. In both of Morrison's novels, there are African American characters who challenge power relations in their communities because they look at situations through a resistance of the dominant, and in their case, racialized gaze. As I progress through my analysis of the novels, I will pinpoint resistance to the gaze. First we have to establish how stereotypes of African American women developed through their marginalization to understand how they resisted oppressive powers.

2.4 Othering: The Mechanism of Marginalization

Othering is a way of seeing something in reductive terms and is a process that has been used to subjugate African American women. In his book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*, Pickering prefers the term Othering to that of stereotype because he asserts that Othering defines the practice of marginalizing individuals or groups in a more comprehensive manner. In defining the terms of Other, Otherness, or Othering, I want to analyze what creates stereotypes and how the central self is moved, by marginalization, to the location, on the border, as the Other. Stereotypes retard the construction of a positive self-image and identity. Pickering states:

The Other is an evaluative form of naming or labeling which defines someone or some cultural grouping in reductive terms. The Other also parallels stereotyping as a strategy of symbolic expulsion, a mundane exocistic ritual, used to control ambivalence and create boundaries. Ludmilla Jordanova has defined the process of othering in this way as 'the distancing of what is peripheral, marginal and incidental from a cultural norm, of illicit danger from safe legitimacy. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 48)

The Other legitimizes a certain community when it expels all that opposes it. Images that question or challenge the 'legitimate' or sought after community are a danger to its inhabitants and are, therefore, vehemently outcast; to establish a self in a 'legitimate community,'¹³ one has to eliminate any threat to a community's

¹³ I use the term 'legitimate community' to describe a sought and ideal community.

foundations. By expelling anything that does not correlate with the concept of self, the Other is created as a receptacle where all that is misunderstood can reside.

A 'legitimate community' reinforces itself through the use of stereotypes. Stereotypes are misrepresentative and often devastating to the individuals thus condemned. They are based on images created by the 'legitimate community' in order to validate their actions and are a:

[...] way of warding off any threat of disruption to 'us' as the 'same together' through the generation of an essentialized Otherness that can be dealt with from the point of view of this 'same together'. It is a collective process of judgment which feeds upon and reinforces social myths. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 48)

Stereotypes allow for a 'legitimate community' to wipe its feet on the marginalized Other [c.f. as it happens to Pecola, an African American girl, in *The Bluest Eye*]. In creating the Other, a community can devalue a person enough so that he/she is denied any form of dialogue with other community members. If this happens, the Other (the devalued person)¹⁴ is denied a form of communication with the 'legitimate community' (the community that upholds the normative/dominant gaze)¹⁵ that leaves him/her no possibility of challenging his/her marginalized status.

Stereotypes solidify the separation between the 'legitimate community' and the Other by creating a boundary and casting people, who do not conform to the characteristics of the 'legitimate community,' to the 'periphery:'

As a rhetorical strategy of exclusion, made in the interests of a unified collective identity, stereotypical othering seeks to deny not only its historical basis but also its basis in dependency on that which it casts out to the periphery. It attempts to separate and distance itself from the subjugated Other. The ritualistic process of social exorcism it performs attempts to

¹⁴ In my thesis and in this specific context, the Other (devalued person) is the African American woman.

¹⁵ The community, in this case, is the group of African Americans who strive for commercialized whiteness.

contain the Other in its place at the periphery. (Pickering *Stereotypes: The Politics of Representation* 49)

When analyzing how a ‘legitimate community’ marginalizes and stereotypes people, we have to look at when a stereotype was first given to us. Understanding the background and history of a stereotype helps us identify what was marginalized during a certain time in history. Pickering explains how this is achieved:

[...] we need to trace the roots historically, for although theorizations of the Other are relatively recent, representations of the Other go back much further. It is because they are deeply rooted in the sediment layers set down by past cultural practices that have become entrenched as powerful social myths. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 49)

An analysis of the history and context of when a stereotype was first used gives us a first step into the social climate in which it originated. For example, “[...] contemporary racist stereotypes are inseparable from the long history of colonialist discourse” (Pickering *Stereotyping: Politics of Representation* 50). I will revisit this idea of the historical interdependence at a later stage in this thesis, when I analyze how many of the relevant stereotypes are deeply rooted in the history of slavery and African American oppression in the United States. However, as a first step I would like to investigate the European concept of the ‘Primitive Other’ and its direct correlation to the development of racial stereotypes and the construction of the Other in the United States.

2.5 The ‘Primitive Other’

To fully establish how stereotypes of African American women evolved, because of her race, we have to see where the idea of the ‘Primitive Other’ was birthed. The ‘Primitive Other’ is the stereotype that Europeans, at the end of the nineteenth century, applied to foreigners who did not fit into their ‘legitimate community.’ It was originally a racial stereotype used to create an infantile and animalistic image of foreigners who had arrived on the European continent.¹⁶¹⁷ Even

¹⁶ C.f. Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 57.

though this term was primarily used when describing African slaves and non-European people in Europe, it resonates through the history of African American women's stereotype. Pickering provides a description of the 'Primitive Other':

The Primitive was a composite, portmanteau figure for Europe's Others, and could be located in various parts of the non-European world, rather than in any particular country or continent. It was nevertheless a racialized object of representation and knowledge, both in its academic and popular forms. The construct of the Primitive came into predominance during the later nineteenth century. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 51)

The 'Primitive Other' affirmed the notion that Europeans were superior to other races. In addition, if the 'Primitive Other' was given characteristics, which associated this racialized figure with savages and animals. It enforced the idea that Europeans had progressed physically and mentally in contrast to non-Europeans.

The 'Primitive Other' was a negative stereotype which enforced European White sophistication. The stereotype originated in Europe to convince Europeans that they were superior to non-European races:

The Primitive was a general type of racialized other, who, while always amenable to specific application according to case and context, appeared to provide evidence of everything that had, through progressive social selection, led to European global supremacy. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 57)

The 'Primitive Other' was created according to race and can be seen in stereotypes of African American women. As I will discuss later, African American sexuality, primarily during the era of slavery, was considered, by the White community, as animalistic and almost bestial as a justification for slave owners' liaisons with African American women. While African American women have been stereotyped because of

¹⁷ A prime example of the 'Primitive Other,' in the case of women, is the Hottentot Venus or Saartje Baartman who was an African woman, brought from South Africa to England in 1819 as a spectacle and was caged and treated as though she were an animal rather than a human. For a further discussion of who she was and what she represented c.f. Hall *Representation* 265.

their race, they have also been Othered because of their gender. In *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*, Pickering cites Simone de Beauvoir, “Although women are not the only Others, the fact remains women are invariably defined as Others” (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 62). Women were and are marginalized because of their sex. One has to recognize that “Black or Jewish women have of course been doubly othered, in racist and sexist terms” (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 62). There are two important arguments here: The first being that groups are ‘Othered’ because of their race, religion, and nationality; the second being that non-European women were doubly ‘Othered’ because of both their race and gender. Both of these arguments pertain to African American women, as we will see in the next chapter.

To conclude my discussion of the ‘Primitive Other,’ I want to look at a quote from Homi Bhabha that Pickering cites in his book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*:

Analyzing stereotypicality through the conceptual lens of the Other allows us to understand more fully how it is implicated in identification as a field of cultural encounter and interaction, how it operates strategically in that field as an ‘arrested and fetishistic mode of representation’ and provides both a desire for and a disavowal of what it commands. (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 69)

In using the ‘lens’ of the Other, what determines a marginalized self can be further investigated. By looking at a stereotype, possibly from the position of the stereotyped individual, we gain a greater understanding of what the stereotype comprises. As I will discuss, stereotype and Othering of African American women has had long history in the United States. To fully understand how we can look at African American women’s stereotype as “an arrested and fetishistic mode of representation,” (Pickering *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* 69) we have to establish what stereotypes are used for African American women and where they originated.

2.6 Stereotypes of African American Women (the Mammy, the Jezebel, the Matriarch)

Shoshana Felman states that to speak for another one is to silence him/her. Those who cannot speak for themselves cannot represent themselves. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is the character without a voice and it is her community that speaks for her. In her essay “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” Felman writes:

But what does ‘speaking for a woman imply? What is ‘to speak in the name of the woman? What in general manner, does ‘speech in the name of’ mean? It is not a precise repetition of the oppressive gesture of representation, by means of which, throughout the history of logos, man has reduced the woman to the status of the silent and subordinate object, to something inherently spoken for? To ‘speak for’ could thus mean, once again, to appropriate and to silence. (Felman “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy” 36)

The denial of self-representation, in her community, is what eventually leads to the crisis of self-identity in Pecola. She lives in a community that views her as the Other. The members of this community marginalize her because of her ugly physical attributes, according to their White infused gaze, setting her away from all that is ‘beautiful.’ In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison gives us a description of Pecola’s marginalization:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was first hers and she gave to us. All of us – all who knew her - felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 162 - 163)

Claudia’s observation in *The Bluest Eye* shows us that by moving Pecola’s image to the outer ring of ugliness, her community feels beautiful. To truly understand what makes Pecola ugly and marginalized as Other, we need to first look at what stereotypes have historically typified the African American woman and where Toni Morrison uses these stereotypes in her novels to expand upon the cultural concept of the self versus the Other.

According to Barbara Christian, a “[...] stereotype is the very opposite of humanness; stereotype, whether positive or negative, is a byproduct of racism, is one of the vehicles through which racism tries to reduce the human being to non-human level” (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 16). Throughout American literature and history we find stereotyped images of the African American woman, which have attempted to typify her role in literature and society by pushing her to the sidelines. In marginalizing African American women, the dominant images of beauty such as Shirley Temple in the 1940s shine in the spotlight.

Starting during the era of slavery¹⁸ and continuing through to contemporary literature, the African American woman has been stereotyped. Predominant stereotypes include: the Sapphire, the mammy, the sex kitten, and the evil woman, “[...] images germinated in the white southern mythology and enhanced and enriched by film, television, and societal programs even to the present” (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 16). These stereotypes and images benefited those who sought a justification for her marginalization:

Throughout the novels of the slavery and reconstruction periods, Anglo-American literature, particularly southern white literature, fashioned an image of the black woman intended to further create submission, conflict between the black man and the woman, an importantly, a dumping ground for those female functions a basically puritan society could not confront. (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 2)

In order for the image of the genteel “White lady” to exist, the funkiness that she repressed needed to be directed onto another woman. Sexuality and funk were not images associated with a white debutant and as a result were directed to the woman of color. Society needed a whipping post and that emerged in the form of the slave woman.

¹⁸ The first record of slaves in the United States dates back to 1619. C.f. Turner and Sadler *African American History* 30.

During slavery, the predominant stereotype of the African American woman was that of the mammy. The mammy was depicted as a woman who was strong and hefty enough to work the fields alongside men, maternal and large breasted enough to nurture and nourish her white charges, funky enough to handle the burden of motherhood, and docile enough to smile willingly at her white masters while waiting for her chores. Sexless and domesticated, she was, “[...] harmless in her position as a slave, unable because of her all-giving nature to do harm is needed as an image, a surrogate to contain all those fears of the physical female” (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 2). She was a woman who counterbalanced the image of the lily-white southern debutant, “These images are dependent on one another, since the white woman could not be ornamental, descriptive, fussy, if she raised and brought up children” (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 2). For, if she was in charge of all the work of maternity, the Southern White woman was ‘free’ to play the part of a social flower.

Below I would like to look at the images of the mammy and the Southern Belle. In just the imagery, presented in the picture, we can see the visual aspects of the mammy and the Southern Belle:



Fig. 1 Ann Sheridan and Hattie McDaniel in *George Washington Slept Here*, 1942. *Representation* (London: Sage Publishing, 2001) 253.

In this picture the mammy is the maternal figure who is hefty, asexual, and domestic in her appearance. The Southern Belle is ornamental and delicate. She is dainty, slim, and free of domestic responsibility.

The crisis found in the image of the mammy is not in her physical appearance but stems out from her maternal role. She is large breasted enough to nourish the ‘would-be slave owners’ of the plantation without enough time for her own children.¹⁹ She has multiple children of her own yet remains sexless. Even though she provides the image of ‘female docility’ to her masters, she is required to tend to the fields and work and be whipped just as a male slave. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins describes the image of the mammy as follows:

The first controlling image applied to U.S. Black women is that of the mammy – the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women’s long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and “family” better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 72)

The stereotype of the mammy causes crisis because the gaze, directed upon her by the White slave master, forms her into a being which is impossible. She cannot assume all the roles which have been delegated to her because of the contradictions they encompass. However, the stereotype imposed upon the African American woman as a mammy served a function during slavery. In creating this stereotype, the White slave master could marginalize the African American woman in order to deny her voice and identity. Without her own voice she is oppressed because she cannot speak up for herself and her identity.

Moving from the mammy to the jezebel or sex kitten, we see the next stereotype which has repressed African American women. The jezebel is the sexually

¹⁹ Cf. Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 18.

aggressive woman. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins cites Christina Davis when describing the characteristics of the jezebel, “The jezebel’s function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women” (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 81). Forming an image of a wanton and sexually aggressive African American woman was advantageous to the White slave owner because it gave him an excuse for his behavior. In presenting the African American woman as sexually aggressive, any rape or unwanted sexual advances against her were justified because theoretically she emitted an aura of sexuality. Collins writes, “The allegedly emotional, passionate nature of Black women has long been used to justify Black women’s sexual exploitations” (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 71). The white slave owner would justify his infidelity to his wife and was helpless against her feminine wiles. Most slave women were helpless against this idea and an African American woman’s oppression lay in the control of her sexuality.

In her book *Black Women Novelists*, Christian argues, “Although the image of the loose black woman is a correlate of the image of the chaste lady, this particular stereotype, in real life, further separated the slave woman from the white woman” (Christian *Black Women Novelists* 14). In creating the image of the jezebel, the Southern White lady was defined as being pure and prudish. Sex was considered bestial and in showing the African American woman as sexually loose, she was further given animalistic characterization. Christian writes:

But given the Southern planters’ definition of sex as an animal function, which was unfortunately necessary for the male to maintain his health and power, the black woman’s animality fit well into the scheme of the division between mind and body, spirit and matter. (Christian *Black Women Novelists* 14)

The idea that African American women were bestial and animalistic justified the thought that African Americans were subhuman to the White community. The image of the sexually loose African American woman, therefore, boosted the image of the

civilized lily-white debutant. As described earlier in chapter 2.3, with reference to Foucault's argument, the image of the jezebel was something to which the Southern White woman could compare herself and reaffirm her own image. These two images of women were, therefore, connected because without the one, the other could not survive.

Knowing that the image of the jezebel was created to affirm the concept of the prudish Southern White lady, we need to delve further into what imagery was used to stereotype her:

Like the mammy, the loose black woman has certain physical characteristics. She is brown-skinned, rather than black, and voluptuous rather than fat, and she possesses a sensuous mouth and a high behind. She is known to have an "evil" disposition, a characteristic that constitutes rather than distract from her sexiness, which is contrasted with the sweet demeanor of the lady. She is good looking and passionate, but never beautiful, for her animal nature rather than her human qualities are foremost in her makeup. She ensnares men with her body rather than uplifting them with her beauty. (Christian *Black Women Novelists* 15)

The image of the jezebel portrayed the African American woman as being a sexual figure who lured the slave owner. In harboring the image of sexuality, the actions of the male slave owners were justified in their actions towards her. The White community perceived her as being sex craved and provocative and, therefore, attracting the advances of White men. Because this image was imposed on her and used as an excuse for the slave owners' advances, she was denied her own voice of protest. She was given no ground to defend herself against this skewed perception of her.

Alongside the image of the jezebel was the image of the sexuality heightened African American male. While the common belief during slavery was that white men "did not" rape African American women, there was a fear of the African American male who would attack a White woman. This fear was used as a justification for the lynching of many African American men accused of rape:

What made lynching so effective was the accompanying cultural narrative that justified and encouraged it – the myth of the black rapist [...] lynching has come to be inevitably associated with the myth of the black rapist. Because of this cultural narrative, the specter of real and imagined lynchings has continued to haunt the black community today. (Katrin Schwenk *The Black Colombiad* 312)

This fear led many African American women to silence the fact that they had been raped by African American men so as to prevent further lynchings. The fear of death, or punishment, often led African American women to silence their protest against what was happening to them during this era of slavery in order to preserve themselves and their race.²⁰

Another outcome stemming from the image of the African American woman as a jezebel was a number of bi-racial children who cropped up on plantations. These children were caught between two worlds and came into being because of an illicit relationship. They were a reminder to the African American community of its helplessness in preventing the African American woman from being raped, and in the White community they were symbols of slave owners' infidelity. Christian writes, "For the black slave man who knows his lack of power to prevent the union between slave woman and master, this child must have represented his powerlessness" (Christian *Black Feminist Criticism* 4). These children, called mulattos or mulattas were outcast from both the white and the African American communities. The African American community saw these children as a sign of their powerlessness as slaves and the White community was reminded of the slave master's sexual liaisons with non-White women.

²⁰ In their book *Gender Talk*, Cole and Guy-Sheftall write, "Many people spoke out against racial injustice and cruelty, particularly the mutilation and lynching of African Americans. One of these people was an African American journalist named Ida B. Wells-Barnett [...] A *Red Record* was published in 1895 in which she documented the lynchings of African Americans. It was the first published record of lynchings in the United States" (Turner-Sadler *African American History* 117). Ida B. Wells, unlike Frederick Douglass, did not advocate race loyalty to the detriment of the African American Community: "It is important to recall at the beginning of the twentieth century, some black women leaders had a different conception of race loyalty; they did not feel obligated to keep "race secrets" (Guy and Cole-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 93).

Later in abolitionist literature, there was a search for a character who represented a “good” African American character. Often this was created in the image of the tragic mulatta. As Christian describes in her book *Black Women Novelists*:

If their heroines were to be effective, however, they would have to combat the negative images of black women in antebellum literature. [...] The closest black women could come to such an ideal, at least physically, would of course have to be the mulatta, quadroon, or octaroon (Christian *Black Women Novelists* 22).

Authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe and other abolitionists needed a character that was not entirely “Black” in order for them to sell the concept of abolitionism to a primarily White audience. It seems ironic and tragic that the mulatta, the daughter who was the child of an illicit affair, became the image who promoted the African American race during the period of the period of abolitionism in the United States.

The main purpose of this chapter was to outline four main stereotypes which characterized African American women during the slave era and have appeared in African American literature. By looking at stereotypes of the strong matriarch, the mammy, the jezebel, and the tragic mulatta we see the different images thrust upon African American women for decades. These are images that were fought against before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement.²¹ These images had to be deconstructed and challenged in order for the African American woman to regain an identity. These stereotypes were a means by which White American communities could marginalize her identity. In her marginalization, her voice of protest was lost. For her to regain her voice and position in communities, the African American women had to reclaim her identity in order to establish an image of herself that truly depicted

²¹ The Civil Rights Era as described in Turner-Sadler’s book *African American History*: “During the 1950s and the 1960s, African Americans continued to face injustices. Hangings, or lynchings, were common. In an effort to address these injustices and secure civil rights for all people, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) were formed. “Civil rights refers to the rights of all citizens to fully participate in society and be afforded equal and fair treatment under the law” (Turner-Sadler *African American History* 169).

her plight and existence. In the next chapter, I wish to explore briefly the way in which African American women regained their voice and subdued the crisis which arose due to their marginalization.

2.7 The Plight of African American Women

Throughout African American women's history, there have been many misguided images, stereotypes, and misconceptions that were used in her definition. Often "people other than the African American woman herself try to define who she is, what she is supposed to look like, act like, and sound like. And most of these creations bear very little resemblance to real, live black women" (Washington *Black Eyed Susans* ix). African American women could not define themselves and, therefore, could not counteract the marginalization they encountered because of their race or their gender. In their book *Recovering the Black Female Body*, Bennett and Dickerson argue, "The black female body is unseen because it is socially constructed as a body not worth the effort of seeing. Such invisibility proves, of course, damaging and denigrating. Yet all too often the gaze, the body, is still perceived as unworthy, if not worthless" (Bennett and Dickerson *Recovering the Black Female Body* 197). Because of her oppression, the African American woman was in effect "de mule uh de world"²² or the whipping post for both her gender and race.

In the previous chapter of this thesis, I analyzed stereotypes that defined African American women's identity for a long time. Now I will move on to discuss an issue that has plagued African American women which is whether or not they should promote their race or their gender when attempting to establish equality for themselves and their right to vote. In 1869, Frederick Douglass²³ stated at the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) in New York City²⁴:

²² "de mule uh de world" is a term coined by Zora Neal Hurston in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to describe the plight of the African American woman.

²³ As Turner-Sadler writes in her book *African American History*, "During the 1800s, a remarkable speaker named Frederic Douglass emerged. He was born into enslavement but managed to escape to New York in 1838. [As an adult] he [Douglass] began to travel throughout the country speaking about the evils of slavery and advocating its abolition" (Turner-Sadler *African American History* 58).

When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lampposts [...] they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own. (Cole and Guy–Sheftall *Gender Talk* 75)

Douglass contends that the urgency to promote race over gender was more pressing because the danger African American people faced, because of their race, was more perilous. However, what is omitted in Douglass' argument is the fact that African American women were also killed during the era of lynchings.

The 15th Amendment to the Constitution²⁵ of the United States ensured the gender gap in the African American community. Figureheads such as Sojourner Truth²⁶, an African American woman, sided with the women's suffragist movement, for fear that if African American men got the right to vote before women, they would continue their oppression over African American women.²⁷ Also, if African American men were given the right to vote before women, African American women would have to “negotiate with and convince their male relatives to use the ballot to advance group as opposed to individual interests” (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 76). Previously African American women and men had been able to collaborate because they both were equally powerless. At the same time as fighting for equality for their race, African American women were facing contention from their male counterparts on the issue of gender.

²⁴ Cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 75.

²⁵ The 15th Amendment, section one states: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Turner – Sadler *African American History* 91).

²⁶ As Turner -Sadler states in her book *African American History*, “Sojourner Truth was born a slave in Hurley, New York. She became free in 1827 when the State of New York abolished slavery. She changed her name from Isabella Baumfree to Sojourner Truth and went around preaching. She eventually added abolitionism and women's suffrage to her speeches [...] Truth lectured widely against slavery and became a leader in the women's movement for equality” (Turner-Sadler *African American History* 59).

²⁷ Cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 76.

Arguments which arose against the promotion of African American woman during the late 19th century surrounded her virtue compared to white Victorian morality, “[a]t the center of these debates were arguments about her [the African American woman] moral character which was a reflection of the general preoccupation with women’s moral nature on the part of Victorian society” (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 77). The African American woman was considered far more sexual than their White counterpart. Alongside this comparison arose the image of her as the strong maternal matriarch. Both images categorized her as either lascivious or supra-human,²⁸ neither of which truly captured the role of African American women in their communities. Some African Americans, however, had adopted and accepted the dominant culture’s stereotypical definition of a woman. In their book *Gender Talk*, Cole and Guy-Sheftall state, “African American women bashing has had a long history in the United States” (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 77). On top the stereotypes that surrounded her disposition, later reports, such as “The Moynihan Report,”²⁹ blamed the fall of African American society on the predominance of female - centered households. Single African American mothers, in this report, became the falling point as to why African American communities were not thriving economically.

While the 15th Amendment in the latter half of the 19th century was being debated in the United States, leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois³⁰ and others argued

²⁸ Cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 77.

²⁹ Forty years ago (1965) “Daniel P. Moynihan, the former U.S. Senator from New York, popularized the correlation between poverty and the increase in female-headed [African American] households” (Scott and Shade Essays on *African-American History, Culture, and Society: An African-American Reader* 15).

“In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, a great many Negro Women as well” <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/moynihan-report-1965> 1/22/2008.

³⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois (1868 – 1963) “[...] was the Renaissance man of African American letters during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. He was the most multifaceted, prolific and influential writer

against stereotypes which oppressed African American women. They did not approve of men enforcing a conservative and destructive image of African American women. Sprouting from the era of slavery and moving up to contemporary times, stereotypes have created problems for African American women because of their damaging effects. False concepts of the role and position of African American women in their communities created ideas which were used to suppress her rise and argument for equality. One of the accepted concepts was that, “[...] racism privileges Black women and situates Black men at the bottom of the heap, reversing the natural order of things with respect to manhood and womanhood” (Cole and Guy – Sheftall *Gender Talk* 83). It was argued that women, rather than having a disadvantaged position regarding their gender and their race, were actually given more freedom since they posed less of a threat to the White community. What was not recognized in this argument is that African American women were oppressed by both their race and gender. Two forms of oppression were directed at them rather than just one.

During the 1960s, African American women were faced once again with the dilemma of whether or not to promote their race or their gender. Throughout the Women’s Liberation Movement and the Black Power Movement³¹ there were debates and arguments as to who should be included in the struggle for equality. In their book *Gender Talk*, Cole and Guy-Sheftall state, “When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when antiracism does not incorporate oppositions to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose” (Cole and Guy – Sheftall *Gender Talk* 71). African American women found themselves oppressed by both their sex and their race. Often they were told that the issues which faced the Black Power Movement superseded their cause as women, as

that black America has ever produced [...] Du Bois’ feminism, though imperfect by today’s standards, came to the fore again in his essay *The Damnation of Women*” (Gates *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* 606-609).

³¹ Some African Americans “feared that African Americans would never be allowed to become equals either economically or politically in the bigoted and social climate of the United States (in the late 1960s), and they espoused racial nationalism rather than integration. These “race first” advocates became known as black nationalists” (The New York Public Library *African American Desk Reference* 62).

can be seen in the words of Elaine Brown,³² a member of the Black Panther Party³³, “If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of the black people” (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 92). African American women found themselves in a dilemma as to which path to pursue; either they supported their race which discounted the importance of being a woman, or they fought for their rights as women in a movement which appeared to be led by bored suburban white housewives. Cole and Guy-Sheftall write:

There was an explicit message in Black nationalist discourse about the destructive aspects of feminism and Black women’s quest for liberation. It was very simple. Feminism is a white middle-class movement that retards racial unity and draws Black women from their more urgent work – eradicating racial oppression. (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 84)

In either case, the plight of the African American woman was not fully recognized. If they dared to speak out against either cause, they risked severe scrutiny from their peers, men and women alike.

The disparity created between race and gender caused women to find themselves conflicted as to where to direct their allegiance.³⁴ Does the imminent danger to one group outweigh the rights of another? Should women of color find themselves sacrificing their gender for racial equality? Is the woman of color required to follow Frederic Douglass in his assertion that challenging African American men would only disband the race? The Black Power Movement at first did not allow for female figureheads,³⁵ believing that women, out of loyalty to the race, would not fight against the patriarchy imposed by the movement. Her duty to her race would require a sacrifice of her gender. Regarding the Women’s Movement of the 1960s, many

³² Cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 92.

³³ Black Panther Party (BPP), is a militant black political organization: “Originally called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the organization was founded in Oakland, California, by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in October 1966” (The New York Public Library *African American Desk Reference* 64).

³⁴ Cf. Cole and Guy Sheftall *Gender Talk* 77.

³⁵ For a further discussion of the role of African American women in the Black Panther Party cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 84).

women who did not follow the pattern of the bored housewife, were not concentrated on as major figures. The African American woman, during these movements, was not allowed full access as a member even though she was party to both movements.

In finding her voice, the woman of color has to examine the stereotype that has been imposed on her throughout history. William Hannibal Thomas³⁶, an African American male activist said of African American women, “Girls of two races will grow up side by side [...] yet the chances are two to one that the negro girl at twenty will be a giggling idiot and lascivious wreck, while her white companion ... has blossomed out into a chaste womanhood, intelligent in mind” (Cole and Guy – Sheftall *Gender Talk* 78). Here we see the disadvantage an African American woman is given by members of her own race. Condemnation of her intelligence and virtue led to stereotypes that were created by men. The adoration of the white woman and the disregard of the African American woman as a wanton seducer is one of the many ways in which her voice was silenced by her own race. One platform that gave the African American woman the chance to be heard was in literature. As will be explored in the next chapter, African American women found a medium, in writing, where she was/is able to voice her identity.

2. 8 African American Women’s Writing: The Reclamation of Identity

Throughout American history, African American women have been bombarded with inaccurate stereotypes of themselves. They counteracted these stereotypes by writing for themselves in order to create an image of their own. The tradition of African American women’s authorship is not simple, because “the development of Afro-American women’s fiction is, in many instances, a mirror image of the intensity of the relationship between sexism and racism in this country” (Barbara Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 234). To clarify the complexity of African American women’s fiction, I will examine where African American women

³⁶ Cf. Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 78.

have disagreed with their representation and why some African American women voluntarily chose to create misrepresentative images of their selves in literature. African American women's authorship is crucial when it comes to creating a self-identity as Christian argues in her essay "Trajectories of Self Definition:"

Of course, many literate persons might say that the commitment to self-understanding and how the self is related to the world within which it is situated is at the core of good fiction, and that this statement is hardly a dramatic one. Yet, for Afro-American women writers, such an overtly self-centered point of view has been difficult to maintain because of the way they have been conceptualized by black as well as white society. The extent to which Afro-American women writers in the seventies and eighties have been able to make a commitment to an exploration of self, as central rather than marginal, is a tribute to the insights they have culled in a century or so of literary activity. (Christian "Trajectories of Self Definition" 233)

The challenge for the African American woman writer is to find a platform where she is able to define herself. Impeded by the world around her and the audience she is writing for, it is hard to create characters who do not appease some audience other than her own. When writing, the African American woman author sometimes has to take into account the African American and White American population in which she lives and what censorship they would impose on her work.

As an example of early African American women's fiction, Barbara Christian, for instance, examines the work of Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*. In her novel, Harper's mission was to draw attention to the plight of the African American woman in the 1890s. As Christian puts it "[...] was pleading for the justice due Afro-Americans, who, in the 1890s, were being lynched, burned out, raped, and deprived of their rights as citizens in the wake of the failure of reconstruction" (Christian "Trajectories of Self Definition" 234). The need to shed light on how African Americans were being killed by Whites was an important motivator for Harper. Because of the delicate topic, she needed to ensure that her characters did not offend the White audience of her novel. To appease her White audience, she incorporated images of African American people which were appealing to the white audience, even

if they were not truly representational; for instance “[b]y creating a respectable ideal heroine, according to the norms of the time, [she] was addressing not herself, black women, or black people, but her (white) countrymen” (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 234). For Harper, attracting the attention of a White audience overrode the need to establish African American female characters who portrayed an accurate account of themselves.

To further elucidate the movement of African American fiction, I would like to explore the impact that Zora Neale Hurston had with her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.³⁷ This novel is often quoted and cited as a novel that broke the mold for African American women characters in novels. As Christian states, “[i]n this radical envisioning of the self as central, and in its use of language as a means of exploring the self as female and black, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a forerunner of the fiction of the seventies and the eighties” (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 234). In her novel, Hurston uses African American English, a cyclical plot structure, and an African American woman protagonist who achieves ‘self-fulfillment.’³⁸ This was different to prior and contemporary novels which catered to a White audience. Hurston is often described as being ahead of her time with the subject matter she incorporated in her writings.³⁹ It was not until roughly sixty years later when the topic of African American women’s selfhood emerged as the predominant theme in novels and literature.

To create a platform for self-definition, African American women authors had to stop pandering to white and male audiences. During the 1950s, starting with Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha* (1953), African American women’s writing again

³⁷ In the *African American Desk Reference*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is described: “*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Reportedly written in only seven weeks, this novel is widely regarded as Zora Neale Hurston’s masterpiece. In addition to depicting the spiritual development of a woman who has been previously dependent on the men in her life, the novel provides a rich portrait of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston’s Childhood home” (The New York Public Library *African American Desk Reference* 340).

³⁸ Cf. Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 234.

³⁹ Cf. Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 237.

shifted the image of the African American woman. In her essay “Trajectories of Self Definition,” Christian examines this concept:

[...] Afro-American women writers are, as Alexis De Veau noted, putting more emphasis on reflecting the process of self-definition and understanding women have always had to be engaged in, rather than refuting the general society’s definition of them. (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 237)

Focusing on self – definition African American women authors decided to voice their experiences in their own words. This is not to say that some of these writings did not still cater to white or male audiences or escape the criticism from those groups. However, it is important to see how the African American woman’s voice was emerging through literature.

African American women authors began to create their own genre of fiction and it was apparent either through the subject matter they chose, the language used, or how they structured their literature. During the 1960s, African American women’s literature tended towards poetry and drama, because the Civil Rights Movement influenced these authors. As Christian explains, “During the sixties few novels by Afro-American women were published; rather, poetry and drama dominated the literature perhaps because of the immediacy of these forms and the conviction that literature should be as accessible as possible to the black communities” (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 240). African women authors were persuaded to pander to the African American audience in promotion of their race rather than their gender:

The ideology of the sixties had stressed the necessity for Afro-Americans to rediscover their blackness [...] one side effect was the tendency to idealize the relationship between black men and women, to blame sexism in the black community solely on racism or to justify a position that men were superior to women. (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 240)

In promoting her race, however, the African American woman writer was forced by this ideology to subdue the subject of gender in her literature. Often it was difficult to

create fiction which appealed her both her race and her gender because African American women were forced to choose which part of themselves they wished to promote.

A great deal of writing emerged after the Black Power Movement which addresses the problems that African American women faced during the Civil Rights Movement. Alice Walker's story *Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells* is a tale which delineates what African American women felt when forced to promote their race over their gender. In promoting the African American male cause, they were silencing themselves as women. This is an issue that many African American women authors broached beginning in the 1970s, as Christian explains, "This fiction in the early seventies represents a second phase, one in which the African American community itself becomes a major threat to the survival and empowerment of women" ("Trajectories of Self Definition" 240). I will explore the influence of the African American community on African American women's writing further when examining Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* later on. In these two novels Morrison is adamant in her criticism of an African American community's destructive attitude towards itself.

Barbara Christian demonstrates how and why the emergence of African American novelist such as Toni Morrison was important. Authors, such as her, criticized both the White and African American communities' adherence to stereotypes of African American women. In doing so, these authors stressed how both communities devalued African American women. With their criticism Morrison and other authors gave a voice back to African American women and the problem they faced:

Black communities are clearly one of the many audiences Morrison and Walker addressed their first novels, for both works critique those communities and insist that they have deeply internalized racist stereotypes that radically affect their definitions of woman and man. (Christian "Trajectories of Self Definition" 240)

In *The Bluest Eye*, “ [...] there is always someone who learns not only that white society must change, but also that the black community’s attitudes towards women must be revealed and revised” (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 241). This novel and other African American women’s writing of the early 1970s focused on the responsibility the African American community had in redefining the image of the African American female and suggested that the revision of her identity needed to start in the African American community itself.

Following the literature of the early 1970s, Christian, further investigates African American women’s writing of the mid-1970s. She avers that African American women authors drastically shifted the focus of their novels. In her essay “Trajectories of Self Definition,” Christian writes:

By the mid-1970s, the [African American women’s] fiction makes a visionary leap. In novels like *Sula* and *Meridian*, the woman is not thrust outside her community. To one degree or another she chooses to stand outside it, to define herself as in revolt against it. (Christian “Trajectories of Self Definition” 241)

What is important to note, is the change in the ‘political’ message these novels had from the early to the mid-1970s. At first, African American women authors, like Toni Morrison, confronted the African American community with their novels by exposing the tragic effects that self-loathing and dislike of blackness can have in African American communities. These women claim that it is the responsibility of the African American community itself to change and revise images used to represent African American women.

Some African American women authors, during the mid 1970s, recreated the image of African American women characters, in their novels. As I will further explain in my thesis, when analyzing *Sula*, African American women authors created female characters who voluntarily lived outside of their communities because they refused to abide by archaic laws. These characters show independence and a strong will power. A new dynamic was created because, instead of the African American woman’s need to rely on her community, her community relied on her strength.

Further analysis will show the outcome of this change in perspective as we go on to discover messages and themes Toni Morrison uses in her literature to project political themes.

2.9 Toni Morrison's Politics

Morrison claims that art is political and a medium in which commentary on community, history, and society are presented. As Morrison states in a conversation with Alice Childress, "I think all good art has been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have been anything other than that" (Childress "Conversations with Toni Morrison and Alice Childress" 3). Morrison politicizes her work through her use of language and the topics about which she writes, "The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* x). In my analysis of Morrison's writing, I want to investigate which political topics she advocates and how she uses language in their presentation. To narrow the focus of my investigation, I will limit myself to the political topics found in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. Morrison politicizes these two novels as a way to promote the image of the African American woman. To understand what images of African American women Morrison wants to promote we have to understand how she politicizes her work.

Politics in Toni Morrison's literature is apparent. She uses her novels as message bringers to the African American community and the world at large. In a conversation with Alice Childress, Morrison stated, "I don't believe artists have ever been non-political. They may have been insensitive to this particular plight or insensitive to that, but they were political because that's what an artist is – a politician" (Childress "Conversations with Toni Morrison and Alice Childress" 4). What writers choose to include or exclude in their writing is greatly important in assessing their political message. Morrison chooses, in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* to write about the lives of African American people and in particular women. She also

uses African American narrators to ensure that an account of events in a community is told according to one of its members.

Morrison lays the responsibility of representation of the African American image on the shoulders of African American authors and critics. She also ascertains that critics, of African American literature, need to employ African American ‘criteria for criticism.’ In her conversation with Alice Childress, she stated, “Black people must be the only people who set out criteria in criticism. White people can’t do it for us. That’s our responsibility and in some way we have to do it” (Childress “Conversations with Toni Morrison” 7). Morrison does not say that a White, Asian, or Native American critics cannot analyze and comment African American writing; however, if they do, these critics need to employ African American methodology when creating their arguments. If these critics fail to recognize this methodology, their analysis is incomplete and inaccurate.

Shifting from the analysis of African American work to the incentives Morrison found for writing her works, I want to analyze why Morrison began writing. I have established that Morrison believes art and literature to be political; therefore her writing must have a clear political statement. In a conversation with Charles Ruas about what urged her to begin writing *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison said:

I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled; and also about the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be someone else, and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who were peripheral in other people’s lives.
(Ruas “Toni Morrison” 95-96)

Morrison’s political message, as seen in this quote, is that the concept of ideal physical beauty is dangerous. Throughout her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison draws attention to the ‘damaging effects of beauty’ and specifically when it influences a young African American girl. Morrison, by focusing on the destructive nature of physical beauty in her novel, politicizes how commercialized images can be hazardous. In an attempt to counteract prior damage to the image of African American’s, Morrison

claims in her conversation with Christina Davis, that the African American needs to write for themselves:

Yes, the reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There is a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. (Davis "An Interview with Toni Morrison" 224-225)

According to this quote, in order to move forward the African American author needs to be attuned to prior images of African Americans and consciously recreate this image according to his or her own experience.

In her novels Morrison politicizes race. She also promotes the plight of women and specifically African American women. To ensure that the issues surrounding African American women are recognized Morrison writes a political novel, where the image of the African American woman is center staged:

In the beginning I was just interested in finally placing black women center stage in the text, and not as the all-knowing infallible black matriarch but as a flawed here, triumphant there, mean, nice, complicated woman, and some of them win and some of them lose. (Davis "An Interview with Toni Morrison" 231)

In centering the African American woman in her novels, Morrison moves these women from their position as a marginalized 'Other' to the center stage and gives them a voice to retell their story. Having a voice in literature and subsequently in the political arena is important. Morrison discussed, with Bonnie Angelo, the lack of authentic African American presence in canonical literature, "Never heard. Blacks don't speak for themselves in the texts. And since they were not permitted to say their own things, history and academy can't really permit them to take center stage in the discourse of the text in art and literature" (Bonnie Angelo "The Pain of Being Black and Interview with Toni Morrison" 258). Without any models and any accurate

descriptions of African American women, Morrison chooses to focus on these women in her writing.

Morrison engages in the politics of identity for African American women when writing through the eyes of an African American woman. As she argues, African Americans, especially women, need to create literature that offers an accurate account of African American heritage, plight, and imagery. Creating fiction, in which a real critique of the African American woman is present, is a political act. Morrison's strategy is to bring the African American woman to the center stage where she can be validly viewed. She, therefore, politicizes her novels by including topics and revisions of images that she feels need to be revised.

2.10 Toni Morrison's Literary Technique

In my analysis I find that Morrison uses language to emphasize a political statement. Which form of language, how it is written, and what is included or excluded in a text transmits a message to the reader. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison writes about how language manipulates the audience's interpretation of a text and Morrison takes particular interest in how language represents race:

[...] I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. [...] The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains. (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* x-xi)

Morrison is conscious of her art and which images she transmits through language. For her, language is a mechanism she uses to establish an African American form of authorship. Knowing the constraints which were previously placed on African

American writers Morrison, as she states in her book *Playing in the Dark*, needs to create a language which reflects African American women:

What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race readers that understands it itself to be "universal" or race – free? In other words, how is "literary whiteness" and "literary blackness" made, and what is the consequence of that construction? (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* xii)

I would like to argue that Morrison questions if it is possible to create a 'race free' work and whether or not it would be a suggested form of writing. This quote shows one of the major dilemmas Morrison has in her writing. One question she continually tries to answer is whether or not it is possible to move beyond race and language.

In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison examines the issue of 'racialized literature' through the works of other authors. In describing her own writing and that of other authors Morrison writes:

My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racially world. To think about (and wrestle with) the full implications of my situation leads me to consider what happens to other writers work in a highly racialized society. (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 4)

Morrison contemplates how other authors tackle the issue of race in literature. She writes, "But I remain convinced that the metaphorical and metaphysical uses of race occupy definitive places in American literature, in the "national" character, and ought to be a major concern of the literary scholarship that tries to know it" (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 63). Morrison acknowledges that race can influence literature and according to her argument an author needs to be wholly conscious of this subject. However, she argues that even if a work appears to be infused with racial imagery, the audience cannot assume that the writer agrees with what his or her characters convey. To further explain how a writer can have characters in their literature who present a different perspective than the author, Morrison examines Hemingway's writing:

It would be irresponsible and unjustified to invest Hemingway with the thoughts of his characters. It is Harry who thinks a black woman is like a nurse shark, not Hemingway. An author is not personally accountable for the acts of his fictive creatures, although he is responsible for them” (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 86).

Morrison shows how an author can be separated from his/her characters. For example it may be important to examine why the character was used at all rather than what he or she embodies. In examining different methods of writing and creating literature, Morrison thinks and rethinks how her writing should be formed.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison reviews other authors and their authorship in an analysis of how literature conveys meaning through the language it uses and can therefore be a platform for political discussion and thought. In Morrison’s case the issue of race is prevalent. She writes, “The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 5). It can be assumed from this quote that Morrison implores us to acknowledge the presence of race in literature. In analyzing the emphasis or exclusion of race in literature, one is forced to look at what impact it has. We can speculate that in broaching the topic of race and literature Morrison politicizes her writing. She requires the academic, the critic, and the reader to acknowledge that race plays an important part in literature and cannot be dismissed. I will investigate further the topic of race when I analyze *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* in the upcoming chapters.

3. *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is a story that tells the tale of the young African American girl, Pecola Breedlove, and her tragic search for ‘blue eyes.’ The novel was first published in 1970 at the height of the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement and the text can be seen as a political allegory for the issues facing African American women at the time. As Kubitschek argues in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, “The novel

realistically explores a black community in a particular time and place – Lorain, Ohio in the 1940s-and shows that the events there result from wider social realities of racism and poverty” (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 28). Inundated by images of ‘White beauty,’ Pecola, like many African American women during the 1940s, strove to emulate Hollywood icons such as Shirley Temple. The outcome of this mimicry of images was tragic for Pecola and for other African American women who tried to bleach themselves of their race and heritage in order to achieve ‘Whiteness.’

The novel is set in Lorain, Ohio during the year 1940. African Americans in this town are influenced by World War II, Hollywood, and poverty. A predominant distinction between families in the novel is their economic status which is often equated with blackness. The poorer one is, the blacker they appear. In her article “Toni Morrison,” Sissman writes:

[...] the overriding motif of this book, the desirability of whiteness, or, as the next best thing, the imitation of whiteness; as a corollary, blackness is perceived as ugliness, a perception that must surely have given rise in later years to the overcompensatory counterstatement “Black is beautiful.” (Sissman “Toni Morrison” 5)

The African American community in Lorain struggles for whiteness and none of its members are left unaffected, they buy white baby dolls for their children, straighten their hair, and ignore Pecola Breedlove because she is African American and poor. At the end of the novel there is a description of Pecola, flapping her arms like a bird and muttering to herself. She fell into madness because her struggle to have blue eyes failed and she is left, as she was born, unloved and alone.

The novel is positioned primarily around the events in the Breedlove and MacTeer households. Both families are African American, however the Breedloves are poor African Americans “and they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantel over them, and went about the world with it” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 28) whereas the MacTeers are African Americans who work to improve themselves.

Claudia MacTeer is the primary narrator in the novel; however, Toni Morrison juxtaposes her narration against other characters' narrations to create a crossbred view of events. Claudia is also the character who is juxtaposed against Pecola. Where Claudia fights against the thought that being African American is ugly, Pecola accepts this idea wholeheartedly. The brutality of Pecola's life, "[...] shows racism's damaging effects on the black community at large and on black families" (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 27). Throughout the story the reader is inundated with the horrific events that happen to Pecola and other African Americans. She is abused by her family and schoolmates, hated by her community, and eventually raped by her father in the 'only act of love anyone ever showed her.'

In the next chapters I argue how Morrison represents the crisis of identity African American women face in *The Bluest Eye* and on a larger scale. Through the structure of families, the inclusion of mythical figures, definitions of the self in the community, eruptions of funk against the community, and her narrative technique Morrison communicates a political message to her audience. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek states, "*The Bluest Eye* shares concerns with the two most powerful social forces in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, The Black Power movement and the feminist movement" (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 28). *The Bluest Eye* is not only a tragic story of a little girl wanting something she could never dream of obtaining, the true tragedy lies in a community's destruction of itself and its image.

3.1 Family in *The Bluest Eye*

3.1.1 The Structure of the African American Family Represented in *The Bluest Eye*

A very important theme in Morrison's novel is the concept of the family. In her fiction, Morrison creates very intricate models of families. The complex family structures, found in Morrison's fiction, exemplify how one cannot use the image of the White patriarchal nuclear family as a template for analyzing African American families. In her book *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness*, Heinze describes the representation of the African American family in *The Bluest Eye*:

While Morrison writes primarily about the need for the family and community to nurture and sustain the individual, she never valorizes the traditional structure, which for the majority of whites and blacks in America until very recent times consists, major studies have shown, of two parents and their children. Instead, Morrison chooses to consistently, almost systematically, dissect the nuclear structure. (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 55)

Morrison rejects stereotypical family roles to create an area where an actual account of events and cultural situations is represented. Rather than falsely superimpose the 'ideal White nuclear family' image, where two children are raised by their mother, and financially provided for by their father, Morrison creates very complex and indefinable family roles for her characters. Unwilling to perpetuate a normative image of African American families, she mandates, through her novels, that her readers reexamine stereotypes in order to fully understand the African American family.

One way in which Morrison emphasizes the complexity of the African American family is by including many women-headed households in her fiction. It is important to note the strength that can generate from a woman centered African American household. However, the female-headed African American household has not always been praised. In the mid – 1960s *The Moynihan Report*⁴⁰, written by

⁴⁰ In their book *Essays on African-American History*, Scott and Shade write, "Thirty years ago (1965) Daniel P. Moynihan, the former U.S. Senator from New York, popularized the correlation between

Senator Moynihan, pinpointed the predominance of matriarchs in African American families as the primary reason for their decline, “Since the infamous Moynihan report in 1965, Americans have come to see the African – American family as a matriarchy in which mothers rather than fathers have power and presence” (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 66). The “Moynihan Report” was very influential when it was published and even though the data in the report is currently outdated, it still perpetuates the negative effects of a matriarchic African American family. Contrary to Senator Moynihan’s report, it could be argued that the ‘powerful matriarch’ is a beneficial concept found in African American families. In her book *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness*, Heinze notes how Morrison counteracts Moynihan’s argument using alternative family structures in her novels:

She scrambles the structure, locus, ideology, and value system of the family, dramatically illustrating that the home is not necessarily housed in a two-parent nuclear family but where the heart is. Morrison says that the nuclear family “is a paradigm that just doesn’t work. It doesn’t work for white people or for black people. Why we are hanging on to it, I don’t know. (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 66)

Morrison embodies the conflict between traditional nuclear families and communal families in *The Bluest Eye*. To understand what this conflict between these families entails, we need to examine the array of different households in the novel.

To analyze families in *The Bluest Eye* we need to first look at mothers in the novel. There are three main bloodmother⁴¹ characters in the novel: Mrs. MacTeer, Pauline Breedlove, and Geraldine. Mrs. MacTeer has a husband who is the breadwinner of the family and therefore they represent a nuclear family. Pauline Breedlove is forced by the inability of her husband, to take on a job as a servant to a

poverty and the increase in female-headed black households” (Scott and Shade *Essays on African-American History, Culture and Society* 15).

⁴¹ Bloodmothers are biological mothers who are expected to care for care for their children. But African and African American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers – women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities – traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 178).

White household, embodying the image of a faithful mammy while being the sole breadwinner for the family. Geraldine is a woman, provided for by her husband, but due to an internalized hatred of her race refuses to allow any sign of blackness to cross her threshold. She represents the bi-racial community in Lorain who strive to be capitalist White nuclear families while vehemently trying to abort connections with the African American community. In her description of these three families in her book *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness*, Heinze writes, “Morrison’s first fictional families are dialectical voicings and revoicings of traditional nuclear families versus women-constructed, women headed households” (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 66). Morrison creates three households that either challenge or fall prey to the mandate of the nuclear family. Interestingly, the head of each of the families is the mother.

The three mothers Mrs. MacTeer, Polly, and Geraldine represent three different approaches to motherhood within an African American family. Mrs. MacTeer is a bloodmother and an othermother, a woman who embraces her community and does not understand why one would not ‘take care of one’s own.’ Pauline Breedlove is a woman who abandons her family to pursue the myth that everything white is powerful and beautiful. Geraldine is caught in a bi-racial middle class and therefore tries to prevent ‘African Americanness’ in her family’s appearance in order to mimic a white suburban lifestyle. Having three different family structures, that incorporate different versions of matriarchal roles, Morrison shows us the complexity of the African American family. There is not just one stereotype that can be superimposed on the African American family, rather it is an organism rooted and ruled by a complex history and heritage.

The African American family structure, within *The Bluest Eye*, cannot be viewed through only one lens. In her book *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness*, Heinze notes, “Any historical sociological recounting of black family life is at best an approximation of a very complex social phenomenon” (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 58). There is a struggle to define, if definable, what the

African American family entails because it is such a socially constructed phenomenon. Morrison replicates the complexity of African American families in her novel:

She (Morrison) sets up tenuous dyads and triads in her earlier novels only to abandon them as she creates even more complex and bizarre families in her later novels. Her families themselves constitute genealogical lines of fictional descent, some of which become extinct and others that engender aberrant and even startling configurations. (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* 66)

In Morrison's replica, her novel, she examines what constitutes an African American family, whether it is a purely blood relation or if communal families are a more appropriate visage. Having women, as the productive heads of households, is a great image, however, there is the question of where men fit into these families. Morrison often uses a 'failed' male character, as an example, Cholly Breedlove, in *The Bluest Eye* to emphasize how matriarchies can be more beneficial than a nuclear patriarchic family.

Cholly Breedlove is a 'failed' male character because he is emasculated and lackluster father. He is unable to be the breadwinner and protective father to his children. In *The Bluest Eye* Cholly sets out on a deranged quest to overcome his emasculation which leads to the destruction of his family. In her essay "Focusing on the Wrong Front: Historical Displacement, the Maginot Line, and *The Bluest Eye*," Jennifer Gillan describes the reasons for Cholly's demise:

The history of Cholly Breedlove suggests that his demoralization over his exclusion from full citizenship is the emasculating force in his life. Contrary to the Moynihan Report's claim that it is the matriarchal structure of the black family that imposes a "crushing burden on the black male," Morrison demonstrates that it is the attempt to embrace patriarchy that crushes Cholly's spirit. Although Morrison begins Cholly's section with the line "SEEFATHERHEISBIGANDSTRONG," the experiences detailed therein reveal the negative impact of the patriarchal assumptions inherent in the artificial social demarcations intrinsic to the nuclear family. (Gillan "Focusing on the Wrong Front: Historical Displacement, the Maginot Line, and *The Bluest Eye*" 292)

Cholly's inability to provide for his family and be the head of the household is one of the motivating forces in his behavior. In the novel he aspires to regain his masculinity. His concept of masculinity, as stated in the quote above, is artificial and, therefore, unobtainable.

Cholly is emasculated according to the image of the nuclear family because he is not the head of the household and the breadwinner. He also has no concept of what being a father entails. Abandoned by his own father and raised by women, Cholly is never instructed about his role as a father. Subsequently he does not know how to love his daughter. In describing Cholly's attitude towards his daughter Morrison writes:

How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What would his calloused hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and of like would be useful to her? What could his heavy arms and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 127)

Sadly, Cholly rapes his daughter in a delusional attempt to show her parental love. This perverted act not only destroys his daughter, and his family, but cruelly gives him power. He has conquered someone weaker than him and is, therefore, no longer the one on the bottom of the totem pole. He overcomes his emasculation by raping his daughter. The rape of a daughter is a dreadful act, however, the more pressing issue is what caused Cholly to do this vile act. By including the rape, in her novel, Morrison seems to emphasize how destructive a quest for masculinity⁴² can be.

In the novel, Mr. MacTeer is the alternate father figure. Unlike Cholly, Mr. MacTeer provides for his family and follows the role of the 'respectable' father figure. He protects his daughters from the wandering hands of the child molester Mr. Henry and does what a 'father should do.'

⁴² In this context I refer to a masculinity that is achieved in a nuclear family where the father is a provider and head of a household therefore his role as a man is secure.

Wolf killer turned hawk fighter, he worked night and day to keep one from the door and the other from under the window sills. A Vulcan guarding the flames, he gives us instructions about which doors to keep closed or open for proper distribution of heat, lays kindling by, discusses qualities of coal, and teaches us how to rake, feed, and bank the fire. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 47)

Mr. MacTeer fights for his family and wants to keep environmental and financial dangers away. The care he provides is one of survival. The dutiful love that he invests is not like Cholly's love. It is not an all consuming lust or urge. It is the role that he is assigned and that he fulfills to ensure the continuance of his offspring and as a broader allegory, the survival of the African American community.

Having a nuclear family, where the father is the head of the household, is not always possible. In Morrison's fiction, particularly *The Bluest Eye*, we can see destructive outcomes if one tries to implement a nuclear family structure where it is unobtainable. For example, Cholly's rape of Pecola is an act of perverted patriarchy. In *The Bluest Eye* we have the Breedloves who are not a 'nuclear' family and we have the MacTeers who appear to be one. Rather than trying to form a nuclear family it should be recognized that there are other forms of acceptable families for African Americans. I argue that Toni Morrison emphasizes the beneficial outcomes of families that are either matriarchies or communally created structures in order to emphasize the point that a nuclear family is not always necessary or beneficial.

3.1.2 Communal Family Structure

In *The Bluest Eye* we not only see families that are comprised of a father and mother, but ones that are organized through collective groupings. It is in her community, rather than at home, where Pecola finds a family and love. China, Poland, and Marie are the first othermothers who show Pecola love, "Three whores lived in the apartment above the Breedloves' storefront. China, Poland, and Miss Marie. Pecola loved them, visited them, and ran their errands. They, in turn, did not despise her" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 38). The three prostitutes do not fully fulfill the role of a

mother for Pecola, but they worry about her and ask her to run errands. Unlike everyone in Lorain, Ohio, these women do not despise Pecola's ugliness/blackness and they allow her to visit them. These women also perpetuate the African tradition of oral storytelling when they allow Pecola to listen to the stories of their lives. In this storytelling these women pass along their knowledge, as a mother would do, to the next generation: Pecola.

The next foster family Pecola finds is the MacTeers. Pecola lives with this family after she is raped. She is adopted into this family not because she is a blood relative, but because Mrs. MacTeer believes that in order for the African American community to survive, it must take care of its own. Mrs. MacTeer is the second othermother in Pecola's life. The description of Pecola's inclusion into the MacTeer family goes as follows:

Mamma told us that a "case" was coming – a girl who had no place to go. The county had placed her in our house for a few days until they could decide what to do, or, more precisely, until the family was reunited. We were to be nice to her and not fight. Mamma didn't know "what got into people," but that old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 11)

Pecola is not loved and properly cared for by her family; therefore, she searches for alternate families. These substitute families provide her with a stronger bond than her 'nuclear family' ever does. For example, Pecola bonds with the MacTeer daughters as if they are sisters. Mrs. MacTeer is a stern mother, however, she comforts Pecola when she has her first menstruation and explains the whole process. Unlike Pauline, Pecola's bloodmother, she provides Pecola with the few pieces of guidance she can give this destroyed girl. Once again, as is the case with the prostitutes, knowledge is passed from an othermother to Pecola.

3.2 Mothers and Motherhood

A bloodmother is meant to be the first one to glance at her child and see her as beautiful. What happens when a mother rejects this idea and sees her child's ugliness? Where can the child find a positive self-image from which to construct their identity? In her essay "Pariah's and Community," Roberta Rubenstein discusses the mother-child bond:

D.W. Winnicott has proposed that the core of what eventually forms as the individual's self-concept begins with the mirroring that occurs between mother and baby. Typically, what the baby sees when it looks into its mother's face is "himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she sees there." In this sense, then Pecola's first perception is her mother's reflection of her ugliness. From the seed of that initial negation grows her subsequent "fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life. (Rubenstein "Pariah's and Community" 129)

At birth Pecola is deemed ugly and this is where her lack of self-love originates, "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 98). Pecola internalizes her ugliness which stems from her mother and her community's belief that 'blackness' is equated with ugliness and therefore they positioned her at the bottom of their social strata, "Her position at the bottom symbolizes the regrettable need to pronounce someone inferior in order to defend a fragile sense of self-worth" (Rubenstein "Pariah's and Community" 130). Pecola is the character who everyone compares themselves to in order to affirm their beauty. What is disheartening is that her mother was the first person to cast this negative gaze on her child.

To fully understand Pauline's rejection of her daughter we have to evaluate her character. Pauline is a hard character to define. She is a mother who rejects her children and a strong, sexual, breadwinner who bows to the whims of her White employers the Fishers by playing the role of the mammy. She is an artist whose artistry is taken away from her when she marries and has a family. Pauline is not a doting and caring bloodmother and she is the first person who affirms Pecola's ugliness. She is therefore the first person to contribute to Pecola's crisis in identity, "Seduced by appearances, Pauline dams her only daughter at birth [...] The emotional

crippling shared by Cholly and Pauline is indeed bred into the next generation” (Rubenstein “Pariah’s and Community” 129). Rather than breaking the cycle of self-hatred, Pauline passes on her own self-hatred of her ‘blackness’ to her daughter.

What is confusing is that even though Pauline rejects her children, she still provides for them. She works so that there will be food on the table and they will have a roof over their heads. She fights Cholly when he is drunk and tries to bandage together a household. However, little by little Pauline’s interest dwindles in her family and she rejects them in favor of the White family she works for:

More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man – they were like the afterthoughts one has before sleep, the early morning and late evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 99)

In abandoning her domestic responsibility at home, she becomes the perfect domestic helper for the Fishers:

Hearing, “We’ll never let her go. We could never find anybody like Polly. She will not leave the kitchen until everything is in order. Really, she is the ideal servant.” Pauline kept this order, this beauty, to herself, a private world, and never introduced it to the storefront, or to her children. Then she bent toward respectability, and in doing so taught them fear, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly’s mother’s. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 100)

Pauline’s family falls apart when she loses interest in them. She is the mother figure who is meant to keep her family together. When Pauline loses interest in her role as a mother, and focuses her energy on running the White Fisher household, is when her children and husband split apart. Similarly when the African Americans, in Lorain, replace their interest in their heritage and ‘Blackness’ and replace it with a comfortable ‘Whiteness’ the community falls apart. It seems, in the novel, when African Americans ignore their roots they are bound to experience self-destruction.

The counterproductive nature of self-hatred, because of one's race, is counteracted with Claudia's character. Claudia, like Pecola, is an African American girl. What differentiates the two girls is that Pecola comes from a house of self-hate and Claudia comes from a house of love. In the novel Pecola becomes where Claudia survives and succeeds. The point of this novel is that if a community and family supports one of its members, that person will thrive. If that person is rejected and ignored, they will fall apart. Claudia's world is not a perfect environment where 'Black is Beautiful'. Her family buys her Shirley Temple dolls for Christmas believing them to be beautiful:

It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked. What was I supposed to do with it? (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 13)

What differentiates Claudia from Pecola is that she challenges her parents and their belief system that white is beautiful. Later on Claudia destroys her baby doll. She finds no beauty or benefit from the doll. In questioning why her family found this doll so beautiful, she is questioning a community's love for all things white. Why was she not given an African American doll? Pecola, however, loves Shirley Temple and wishes for her blue eyes. In a tragic quest she sets off to obtain blue eyes. She believes that these eyes would make her beautiful. This impossible quest leads her into madness. To emphasize the tragedy of her quest, Morrison compares her tragedy to the plight of three women in Greek mythology.

3.3 Greek Myths in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison references three tales from Greek Mythology: the tale of Philomena, the tale of Persephone, and the tale of Medusa.⁴³ Morrison connects the tragedies of these three women to the characters in her novel to emphasize the tragedy of Pecola's life. In her essay "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*," Miner notes:

The sequence of events in this story – a sequence of rape, madness, and silence – repeats a sequence I have read before. Originally manifest in mythic accounts of Philomena and Persephone, this sequence provides Morrison with an ancient archetype from which to structure her very contemporary account of a black woman. (Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" 85)

Philomena represents the silencing of Pecola after her rape, Persephone represents a connection to nature and motherhood, and Medusa represents the concept of ugliness. In her essay "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*," Miner connects Pecola's plight and the tragedy of these three women of Greek mythology. In weaving the three myths into the novel, Morrison incorporates the mythic and 'unreal' with the themes of the novel.

The story of Philomena⁴⁴ in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is of a young woman who innocently bids farewell to her father to travel with her brother-in-law Tereus to visit her sister. On the journey, Tereus is overcome by lust and rapes Philomena.⁴⁵ In defiance of Tereus' act Philomena vows to tell everyone about his horrible deed:

I'll speak your deed, and cast all shame away.
.....
My voice shall reach the highest tract of air,
And gods shall hear, if gods indeed there are.
(Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" 86)

⁴ For a detailed description of the three myths reference Davidson Reid *The Oxford Guide to Mythology*.

⁴⁴ Cf. Davidson Reid *Oxford Guide to Mythology* pg. 895 for a further description of the tale of Philomena.

⁴⁵ Cf. Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues" Miner 86.

Fearful of Philomena's confession, Tereus cuts out her tongue and traps her behind a wall to silence her and prevent her from telling her sister about the act. Having cut out her tongue, he rapes her for a second time.⁴⁶ This time she is mute and cannot protest against her assault. What is important is the act of rape in this situation is used as a silencing mechanism and can be paralleled to Cholly Breedlove's rape of his daughter.

There are many theories as to why Cholly rapes Pecola. It is possible that he did it as an act of love, to reclaim his emasculated manhood, or remind himself of his love for Pauline.⁴⁷ In her essay "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*," Miner argues that what is important is not why he performed the act, but that Pecola is silenced by her rape:

To enforce this silence, Cholly need not cut off Pecola's tongue or imprison her behind walls. The depresencing of Pecola Breedlove takes a different form from that of Philomena. Upon regaining consciousness following the rape, Pecola is able to speak; She tells Mrs. Breedlove what has happened. But as Mrs. Breedlove does not want to hear and does not want to believe, Pecola must recognize the futility of attempted communication. (Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" 89)

Through an inner dialogue, caused by her madness, Pecola describes how her mother would not believe her when she spoke about the rape:

You don't understand anything, do you? She didn't even believe me when I told her.
So that's why you didn't tell her about the second time?
She wouldn't have believed me the either.
You're right. No use telling her when she wouldn't believe you.
(Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 158)

Mrs. Breedlove does not accept the fact that her husband raped her daughter. She silences Pecola when she refuses to listen to the girl's story. Because Pauline does not believe her, Pecola has no one to turn to and no one to defend her from the advances

⁴⁶ Cf. Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues" Miner 89.

⁴⁷ Cf. Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues" Miner 88.

of her father. Left without anyone to talk to, Pecola can only talk to herself and reverts to an inner dialogue so that she can process what has happened to her.⁴⁸ This inner dialogue represents Pecola's madness because she has divided herself into two people. This division creates a split identity, and as was argued before in my analysis of Foucault in chapter 2.3, a person with a split identity is a subject and not a whole person.

To explore rape as a silencing mechanism and 'identity stealer' let us look at how In her essay "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*," Miner compares Pecola's story to the myth of Philomena, she draws a connection between Tereus, Philomena's father, and Cholly:

Ovid notes that Tereus, lusting for Philomena, "wished himself her father" [...] Interestingly enough, however, just as the basic mythemic act (man raping woman) robs the woman of identity, so too the mythemic interact; dependant upon familial roles for personal verification ("mother of," "sister of," "wife of" citation) the female must fear a loss of identity as the family loses its boundaries – or, more accurately, as the male transgresses these boundaries. (Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" 81)

Cholly's rape of his daughter destroys the last family tie that connects the Breedloves. The first disconnection is Pauline's rejection of her daughter, the second is the violation of her daughter by the father, and finally Pauline's refusal to believe that her husband raped her daughter. The further that Pecola is disconnected from her family, the further she moves into her madness, loss of identity, and living in the 'outdoors' of her community.

The second Greek myth that is referenced in *The Bluest Eye* is that of Persephone and Demeter. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek draws a parallel to the novel and the myth when she states:

⁴⁸ Cf. Miner "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues" 89.

The Bluest Eye calls attention to its relation to Greek myth when Claudia begins, “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no more marigolds in the fall of 1941” (9) and then makes the more general case that “our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody’s did.” The Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone [...] recounts a year when nothing grew. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 44)

In the myth Persephone, an innocent daughter, is kidnapped and raped by Hades (the Greek god of the underworld).⁴⁹ Devastated that her daughter has disappeared, Demeter, the god of nature, abandons the earth in search of where she might be. During this period the earth is barren and nothing grows. As a consequence, the other gods intervene and mandate that Persephone should be returned to her mother. However, after having been tricked into eating fruit in the underworld, she is forced to spend part of the year with Hades and part of the year with her mother.⁵⁰ The time when Demeter is separated from her daughter is fall and winter, and when she returns, there is spring and summer.⁵¹ Seeing how *The Bluest Eye* is separated into seasons, which denote the chapters, we can see the connection of the novel to this myth.

The second point that Kubitschek notes in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* is how Morrison reverses the connection of the mothers and daughters in *The Bluest Eye* when we see Demeter paralleled with Mrs. Breedlove:

The mother figures of the myth and the novel represent not just different but opposing attitudes toward the daughters. Because the similarities to the myth are suggested first, the reader expects Mrs. Breedlove to play the Demeter role, but the novel reveals her to be as destructive as Cholly, the Hades figure. *The Bluest Eye* is structured to increase the reader’s sense of dissonance between the archetypal story and the novel. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 45)

⁴⁹ Cf. Myth of Persephone as found in Davidson Reid *The Oxford Guide to Mythology* 858-870.

⁵⁰The gods work out a compromise by which Persephone spends six months of the year in the underworld, during which Demeter mourns and we have fall and winter, and six months with Demeter, during which we have spring and summer (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 44).

⁵¹ Cf. Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 44.

The archetype, described in the myth, is one where a mother roams the earth in search of her daughter. Pauline, however, rejects her daughter for the fantasy world she lives in at the Fisher's house and the White girl she supervises.⁵² Seeing the destruction of this maternal connection, reflected in the novel, we see how the matriarchal roles are complex and often do not follow a prescribed path. As Miner discusses in her essay "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" Pauline, ignores Pecola and therefore deprives her of an identity:

The processes of identity construction and personal integration involve an extremely sensitive and constantly shifting balance between seeing and being seen – so that, for example, only after an infant sees itself reflected in the mother's eyes (that is, given a presence) can the infant, though its own eyes, bestow a presence to others. (Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Miner "Rape, Madness, and Silence in *The Bluest Eye*" 93)

Morrison references a myth that revolves around a mother's all encompassing love while creating a mother character, Pauline, who will not even recognize her own daughter and bestow any form of positive identity. This emphasizes how destructive "a concept of beauty can be." Pauline sees her daughter as ugly and subsequently rejects her which completely opposes Demeter's quest and love for her daughter. In essence, Pauline defies nature, in her lackluster parenting.

We now come to the third mythical figure which Morrison references in the novel, the Medusa.⁵³ According to legend, Medusa had been known for her charm and her beautiful hair. Neptune, the god of the sea, overcome by lust, rapes her. As a punishment for 'violating' the temple of Minerva, the location where the rape occurred, Medusa's hair is transformed into numerous snakes and the power of her gaze can turn a man into stone.⁵⁴ Perseus, a hero, becomes immortal when he severs the head of Medusa. The concept of Medusa is very ambiguous in Greek mythology and on a larger scale, "The fascination she exerts arises from a combination of beauty and horror. Her head was used, in Ancient times, as an apotropaic mask—a sort of

⁵² Cf. Kubitschek Toni Morrison a Critical Companion 45.

⁵³ Cf. Davidson Reid *The Oxford Guide to Mythology* 650.

⁵⁴ Cf. Davidson Reid *The Oxford Guide to Mythology* 650.

talisman which both killed and redeemed” (Brunel *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes* 779) The Medusa is a dual figure which represents evil and salvation.⁵⁵ Her duality of character makes her a complex mythical image to analyze because she represents both morality (good versus evil) and gender (masculinity versus femininity).

The myth of Medusa is also used as an allegory for the domination of men over women and the separation of the sexes.⁵⁶ In conquering these strong women, Perseus has rendered these women less powerful. The power they have lies in their ‘sexuality’ and now the terrifying/powerful aspect which instills fear in men, is removed. In his book *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, Brunel argues:

The episode of Perseus’ victory over Medusa represents the end of female ascendancy and the taking over of the temples by men, who had become masters of the divine which Medusa’s head had concealed from them. (Pierre Brunel *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes* 782)

Traditionally the image of the Medusa is one of darkness⁵⁷, ugliness, and terrifying sexuality. It is an image that needs to be dominated by men for it to be socially permissible. For example, in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Helene Cixous claims that a revision of the image of Medusa challenges the myth of her ugliness and transforms it into beauty:

Wouldn’t the worst be, isn’t the worst, that women aren’t castrated, that they only have to stop listening to the Sirens (for Sirens were for men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing. (Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa” 885)

Cixous, in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” advocates the reclamation of the image of women through women’s writing, “woman must write for herself” (Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa” 875). She also avers that when women write for themselves, they are able to free their image from the masculine gaze. Cixous claims

⁵⁵ Cf. Brunel *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes* 779.

⁵⁶ Cf. Brunel *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes* 782

⁵⁷ Cf. Brunel *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes* 782.

that if we revisit the image of the Medusa, and revere her as beautiful, rather than a castrating ugliness, her image can be reclaimed. The way in which this must be done, according to Cixous, is for a woman to write about women. Rather than submitting to a male interpretation of the myth, they have to reinvent the definition of the Medusa to establish her in a new light, much in the same way Morrison applies this theory to the image of Pecola.

Pecola's ugliness is eliminated and persecuted much like the ugliness bestowed on the image of the Medusa. Both women are violated twice. Their first violation occurs in being raped and the second is the removal of their beauty. They are shunned from communities because of the fear its members have of them. Pecola is the darkness, ugliness, funkiness, and poverty her community tries so hard to eliminate, "Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they [the community in Lorain] wipe it away" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 64). Medusa is the castrating and dreadfully ugly figure with the power to turn men into stone. Both females are subjected to a domination and execution from men.

Medusa is decapitated by Perseus, who in turn uses her head (the source of power) to thwart his enemies. He kills her and takes her power for himself and in much in the same way Pecola's community kills her self-image when, "we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 163). According to this quote in *The Bluest Eye*, destroying a woman's beauty can leave her powerless. In removing a woman's power, either the community in Lorain or Perseus feeds off of the strength they steal.

The Greek myths incorporated into the novel serve to enhance the tragedy of Pecola's life. The three myths all portray women who were raped and silenced: Philomena has her tongue removed, Persephone is hidden from the world for half of the year, and Medusa is outcast because of her deadly ugliness. In an attempt to reclaim part of Pecola's tragic life and give her power, Claudia retells her story. In her

essay “Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous states that it is in the retelling a woman’s story, part of her identity is restored:

Because so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence,” the one that. Aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word “impossible” and writes it as “the end”. (Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa” 886)

In having a young African American girl narrate the story of another young African American girl, Morrison is doing what Cixous advocates. She is winning back the image of this girl by re-examining what made her ugly through the words of one of her peers. In recapturing part of Pecola’s identity Claudia voices her previous silence. Morrison, through the use of this narrator is redirecting the gaze. Instead of having the white male gaze mandate that Pecola is ugly, she is taking the gaze of a young African American girl and exposes the previous gaze’s destructive ability. Like Medusa, Claudia looks back at her community and gazes at them in an attempt to destroy their power.

In reversing the connection between mothers and daughters and reworking these Greek mythological figures into her novel, Morrison deconstructs the story of these women and reinvents them in her narrative. Tragedy plagues Pecola as it does the three Greek women, however, in weaving their stories into her narrative, Morrison gives a voice to these women and Pecola. As Cixous in her essay “Laugh of the Medusa” advocates:

It is from writing from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be connected into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (Cixous “Laugh of the Medusa” 881)

At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia acknowledges what her community did to Pecola, “We tried to see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 612). Later, as an adult, Claudia realizes the true horror of her community, the community who shuns a poor African American girl so that they could feel better about themselves. Growing up, Claudia accepted the ways of her community and stopped fighting against the predominant mentality that ‘White is beautiful.’ Only later, as an adult, Claudia retells the story of Pecola and chastises herself for her actions. The effect that the community in Lorain has on Pecola is profound and will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.4 Self and Community in *The Bluest Eye*

Throughout *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove searches for blue eyes. Blue eyes, symbolize white beauty which is a destructive and unobtainable beauty. Shirley Temple has blue eyes and so do many of the white Hollywood icons of the 1940s; however, it is impossible for Pecola to obtain this physical feature. In the introduction to *A Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, Justine Tally describes what blue eyes symbolize:

The title *The Bluest Eye* calls attention to itself immediately; the superlative degree of color as well as the singular form of the noun may refer to the damaging white gaze; the omitted plural to the object of desire, an epitome of beauty according to mainstream society; or alternatively, to the saddest story of the demise of a child’s identity (the “eye” as in “I), integral to the blues sung by Claudia’s mother. (Tally *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* 12)

While on her quest for blue eyes, the African American community in Lorain constantly reminds Pecola of her ugliness. Pecola is a poor African American girl living in Lorain, Ohio in the 1940s and she is far from anyone’s ideal of beauty because her community equates blackness with ugliness. What makes this story tragic is not only that the White community condemns her as ugly, but that the African

American community, she is a part of, internalizes and imposes the racialized white gaze upon her.

Helpless to defend herself against the hatred of her 'blackness,' Pecola pitifully struggles to acquire whiteness. Pecola believes that if she were only to have blue eyes, she would be beautiful. To see why Pecola's quest for blue eyes leads her into madness let us look at an argument in Christina Davis' essay "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction:"

As Sartre has pointed out, human relations revolve around the experience of "the Look," for being "seen" by another both confirms one's reality and threatens one's sense of freedom: "I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my act as the solidification and the alienation of my own possibilities." [...] the Other's look makes me see myself as an object in another person's perception. "The Other as a look is only that – my transcendence transcended." If I can make the other into an object in my world, I can "transcend" him: "Thus my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other. (Davis "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" 8)

Pecola's madness comes about because she is unable to attain Sartre's transcendence. When her community looks at her, they see blackness which is equated with ugliness. Pecola succumbs to the ugliness and Otherness that her community casts on her and cannot rise above their gaze/look. Her community, her family, and her peers give her no approval and therefore she is powerless against their disapproval of her image. Without any form of self-actualization, and separated from the other members of her community, she is left alone. Because of her solitary existence, Pecola reverts to inner dialogues for communication. These inner dialogues are a first step towards madness.

Claudia, unlike Pecola, does not fall into madness because she challenges her community's perception of beauty. Claudia lives in a community where Shirley Temple and Hollywood images are idolized. The African American community, that Claudia is a part of, cannot become white, however they strive to accumulate images of Whiteness through the acquisition of white dolls, Mary Jane candies, and anything that they believe will bring them closer to the dream of whiteness. As a child, Claudia

does not understand why her community idolizes White images, “I destroyed white baby dolls [...] to discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say “Awwwww, ” but not for me?” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 15-16). Claudia’s questioning of her community is what ensures her survival as versus Pecola. Unlike Pecola, Claudia does not try to pretend that she is White and actively challenges the dominant concept of ‘White is beautiful.’

The image of Claudia’s destruction of White baby dolls is significant if we tie this to a cause that was being fought for by African American women during the 1960s. At this time women were calling for more representational images of themselves and advocated the production of African American dolls as a means to promote the beauty of black skin. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek recalls:

Activists called for black dolls, for example, to help African American children build self-esteem. The “Black is beautiful” movement enlarged this idea, advocating pride in black skin and African or African American features. In *The Bluest Eye*, the absence of black dolls – and the inescapable presence of white ones-is presented as part of what makes the main character, Pecola, feel invisible. Further, the novel presents the emotional consequences of identifying ugliness with blackness, and clearly shows that too many beautiful children are destroyed by racist aesthetics. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 30)

Claudia fights against her invisibility as an African American girl. She hates Shirley Temple and the idolization of whiteness. Claudia refuses to adopt the normative perception that ‘White is beautiful,’ and this is what separates her from Pecola. Consequently Pecola becomes mad and Claudia survives her childhood as an African American girl.

Claudia destroys White baby dolls to protest against her community’s belief that ‘White is beautiful.’ Another protest arises, from her, when she is at school and forced to see Maureen Peel a ‘high-yellow’ bi-racial girl praised for her light skin, “A high-yellow dream child (Maureen) with long brown hair braided into two lynch

ropes. That hung down her back [...] She enchanted the entire school” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 48). Everyone in Lorain praises Maureen except for Claudia. The African Americans in the community believe that to be Maureen means recognition in the community as a precious commodity. However, her hair is described as being ‘lynch ropes.’ This description of her hair ties Maureen to the image of the ‘mulatta’ and the tragic history of African American women who were raped and lynched by slave owners. Oddly, because of her wealth and whiteness, the community dismisses Maureen’s ‘tragic mulatta’ past and instead idolizes her. In idolizing her, they promote her Whiteness and their history of oppression. All of the African American members of the community love Maureen Peel, except for Claudia, who chooses to make fun of her and abuse her.

Like Claudia there are three women in the community who do not idolize Shirley Temple or Maureen Peel. They are the three prostitutes China, Poland, and the Maginot Line. These women are ‘whores in whores clothing’ and refuse to idolize anyone except themselves:

Three merry gargoyles. Three merry harridans. Amused by a long-ago time of ignorance [...] Their only respect was for what they would have described as “good colored Christian women.” The women whose reputation was spotless, and who tended to her family, who didn’t drink or smoke or run around. These women had their undying, if covert, affection. They would sleep with their husbands, and take their money, but always with a vengeance. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 42-43)

These women revere no one and abuse everyone. We have to wonder why Morrison includes these women if the rest of the community idolizes whiteness. These women, like Claudia, are used to emphasize political statements in the novel. They are not connected to the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement of the 1960s as Claudia is; rather they represent an issue that faced Americans during the 1940s which was World War II. In her essay “*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*” Agnes Suranyi argues:

Morrison’s denunciation of fetishism is augmented by the time frame of her story, the moment the US is entering a war precisely to fight such racist ideology in the imposition of the Aryan, “ideal.” [...] This grand narrative of

history is represented in her designation of the three whores as Maginot Line, China, and Poland, significant places during the war. (Suranyi “*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*” 12)

Morrison’s names her the three prostitutes after events or places in World War II to show how skewed the American perspective was during the 1940s. Even though the United States fought abroad as a leader against racism it was not a nation that took a harsh look at its internal problems regarding race.

Throughout the novel Claudia fights against her community in their belief that ‘White is beautiful.’ She acts as a griot, a mythical story teller/narrator who reflects on the community of Lorain, Ohio. In telling the story of Pecola’s demise, at the hands of her own community, she examines the destructive nature of their vision of ‘beauty’ and how it creates a loss of identity for herself and African American members of the town. Sadly, Claudia admits, at the end of the novel, that as an adult she falls prey to her community’s belief that White is beautiful. She, like the rest of the community, begins to ostracize Pecola because of her ‘blackness’ and consequently adds to the marginalization of this poor African American girl. Claudia realizes that she is not infallible. She follows suit, as others did in her community, and determined that Pecola was ugly, even at the expense of her own identity.

3.5 Eruptions of Funk

An eruption of funk is similar jazz or artistry, something that is truly African American. Funk is the smelly, earthen, feeling that captures one whimsically, and like jazz, is unmethodical and sporadic. Eruptions of funk, for African American women, are moments when nature, African American heritage, and blackness (not equated with ugliness) are fully embraced. I will show, in my analysis of *The Bluest Eye*, how many African American women characters vehemently suppress their eruptions of funk. They are afraid that if they stray from the conformity of their assigned roles as women, they will be outcast from their community.

'Black is Beautiful' was a strong political movement of the 1970s where African American women embraced their eruptions of funk. Instead of ironing out every kink in their hair and denuding themselves of their color, they fought to define themselves through their bodies. In their book *Recovering the Black Female Body*, Bennett and Dickerson describe Morrison's influence during this period of reclamation:

The black female body is unseen because it is socially constructed as a body not worth the effort of seeing. Such invisibility proves, of course damaging and denigrating. Yet all too often, when the black female body is still perceived as unworthy, if not worthless [...] Morrison summons us to the validation of the black female body. (Bennett and Dickerson *Recovering the Black Female Body* 197)

Morrison politicizes her narrative by bringing the African American female body to the center stage. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison describes what images of Hollywood whiteness⁵⁸ made African American women try to rid themselves of their color. Her women characters, who have aspirations of trying to be passably whiter in their society, damage their own sense of worth. In stripping themselves of their color they erased their identity; an example of these women is Pauline Breedlove, who I will analyze here more deeply.

Pauline Breedlove is an artist who describes the world according to color and sensations. While living in the South Pauline revels in her eruptions of funk. She describes smells, tastes, and feel through an artists' imagery. Illustrating this, her first meeting with Cholly revels in color:

When I first seed Cholly, I want you to know it was like all the bits of color from that time down home when all us chil'ren went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of my Sunday dress, and they mashed up and stained my dress. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 90)

⁵⁸ Hollywood whiteness is comprised of actresses such as Shirley Temple, Betty Davis, and Mary Jane. Many people tried to emulate these silver screen icons hoping to improve their lives if they looked like these fairy tale women.

Pauline uses this description at the beginning of her relationship with Cholly, when they both live in the South and have not yet made the migration North. As they migrate North, Pauline faces loneliness and alienation being away from the African American community in the South, “Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, ‘cept I didn’t expect it from them” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 91). To combat her loneliness Pauline goes to the movies. On the silver screen she sees images of pristine white families where the husbands take care of their wives and the children are molded in the patterns of Shirley Temple, “Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 95-96). Not finding any happiness in her house or in her community, Pauline looks elsewhere to satisfy her needs as an artist.

Pauline finally finds her artistry when she is employed in the Fisher household. There she has the freedom to rearrange and sort things which satisfy her artistic needs, however, Pauline’s time as a maid, in the Fisher household, leads to the rejection of her African American heritage and even her children. Susan Willis in her essay “Eruptions of Funk” argues that the demise of Pauline’s artistry causes a split in her identity. By redeeming herself in the Fisher household she is breaking apart from her African American roots. Susan Willis states:

As housemaid in a prosperous lakeshore home, Polly Breedlove lives in a form of schizophrenia, in which her marginality is constantly confronted with a world of Hollywood movies, white sheets, and tender blond children. When at work or in the movies, she separates herself from her own kinky hair and decayed tooth. The tragedy of a woman’s alienation is its effect on her role as mother. Her emotions split, Polly showers tenderness and love on her employer’s child, and rains violence and disdain on her own. (Willis “Eruptions of Funk” 310)

As an ideal servant Pauline abandons her own family, leaving her African American community for a white family, immersing herself there, and assuming the role of a mammy. In the North Polly equates herself with ugliness because she is African

American. To regain some semblance of herself she and takes on the job as a domestic and consequently rekindles a part of her artistry.

The migration North, in *The Bluest Eye*, represents a historic migration that happened from 1916-1940 where African Americans traveled from the South to cities and industrial towns in search of work and a better life. In their book *Essays on African-American History, Culture and Society*, Scott and Shade describe how this migration led to change:

The dual process of urbanization and migration dramatically increased the proportion of blacks living in northern cities between 1916 and 1940. This demographic shift involved the uneasy mingling of the cultures of southern and northern blacks and the eventual evolution of a new urban African-American culture. (Scott and Shade *Essays on African-American History, Culture and Society* 136)

When moving North in search of jobs, spurred by the domestic labor needs of the World Wars, African Americans were uprooted from Southern communities to Northern ones which adhered to a more commercial urban and class conscious mandate. Willis in her essay “Eruptions of Funk” describes this phenomenon:

Migration to the North signifies more than a confrontation with (and contamination by) the white world. It implies a transition in social class. Throughout Morrison’s writing, the white worlds equated with the bourgeois class – its ideology and life-style. (Willis “Eruptions of Funk” 309)

Nowhere is this concept more prevalent in the novel than in the description of Geraldine and the class of women to which she belonged. It is Geraldine and the women like her who uphold their ‘dream yellow’⁵⁹ children and scorned anything black, ugly, or funky because they considered it beneath them.

Geraldine suppresses any eruption of funk in her body, in her household, and certainly in her offspring. She fights tooth and nail to surpass any particularity that associates her with being African American. Although she tries to hide any ‘kink’ in

⁵⁹ Dream yellow children are bi-racial children.

her persona, she is unable to completely eradicate the fact that she is bi-racial and has ties to an African American heritage. She is hiding a part of herself in order to fit into the 'White is beautiful' gaze that her community upholds. In *The Bluest Eye* there is a description of the breed of women Geraldine belongs to:

They go to land grant colleges, normal schools and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. Here they learn the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of a wide range of emotions. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 64)

Here funk or any connection to the embodiment of African American heritage is seen as derogatory and unwanted. These women live in perpetual fear of anything that would associate them to bodily functions, natural and un-straightened hair, and the even more unwarranted emotions. They rid themselves of anything that would tie themselves to their African American identity and especially their sexuality.

In repressing their sexuality, women like Geraldine repress themselves and their natural desire. They wonder why sex could not be mechanical. These women are afraid of feelings and anything that could connect them to being African American. As Willis argues in her essay "Eruptions of Funk," "At a sexual level, alienation is the denial of the body, produced when sensuality is redefined as indecent. Sounds and tactile sensations that might otherwise have precipitated or highlighted pleasure provoke annoyance or disdain [for women like Geraldine]" (Willis "Eruptions of Funk" 311). Sexual satisfaction and a connection to their own bodies would destroy the image of prudishness they so vehemently fight to maintain. Describing Geraldine and these women's participation in sex, Morrison writes:

While he moves inside her, she wonder why they didn't put the necessary private parts of the body in some more convenient place [...] She stiffens when

she feels one of her paper curlers come undone from the activity of love. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 65).

These bi-racial women do not partake in sexual funk. They prefer to maintain their composure and rigid upbringing rather than let any part of themselves come undone, like the paper curler in their hair. Abstaining from one's heritage and the disregard for one's particular race, creates a fissure in one's understanding of one's identity.

This conflict in identity is represented in Geraldine's son, for no matter how short she cuts his hair and how much lotion she applies to his face, he yearns to be able to participate in the funkiness of the African American children around him, "She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers [...] Junior used to long to play with the black boys [...] He wanted to feel their hardness pressing on him, smell their wild blackness, and say "Fuck you" with that lovely casualness" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 67-68). In wanting to be a part of the African American children and not being allowed to Junior procures a violent and sick attitude towards them. He teases the African American girls and throws rocks at the boys.

Without sexuality and funk these bi-racial women and men deprive themselves to what could make them artists. In her book *Fiction and Folklore*, Harris writes, "The novel, therefore, becomes a myth that defines human worth that explores the greatness of a people who were waylaid by the beliefs they have adopted from outsiders" (Harris *Fiction and Folklore* 21). Rather than trying to reclaim their heritage, these bi-racial folks in the community of Lorain, Ohio choose to battle anything that would tie them to nature, their heritage, and funk. They are not musicians, artists, or poets. In the novel, they are described as empty vessels, which transmit the gaze of a white master onto any blackness they see. In depriving themselves of nature and humanity, they impose images created during slavery onto those who share a similar past of chains and capture. They believe that black is ugly and worthless and in doing so cause crisis within themselves and the African American community they shun.

As an antithesis to these bi-racial women Morrison presents Claudia, the girl who revels in funk and the dirtiness associated with being human. She does not view the liquids, feelings, and emotions that emanate out of the human as being distasteful; rather she is fascinated by them. In establishing this little girl as a griot who narrates most of the story, Morrison creates a character who shows us that the path back to selfhood in the African American community is in the acceptance and admiration of what it is to be funky. Claudia is the sensual savior who aims to recreate the link between African American's and their historical identity. In her essay "Eruptions of Funk," Willis describes these bi-racial women:

Morrison's aim in writing is very often to disrupt alienation with what she calls eruptions of "funk". Dismayed by the tremendous influence of bourgeois society on young black women newly arrived from the deep South [...] Morrison describes the women's loss of spontaneity and sensuality. They learn "how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of emotions. (Willis "Eruptions of Funk" 310)

Claudia is fascinated with the grotesque and the sensual. Even vomit to her is fascinating: "The puke swaddles down the pillow onto the sheet – green-gray, with flecks of orange [...] How, I wonder can it be so neat and nasty at the same time?" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 6). Claudia examines the puke and describes it so that it is not disgusting, but rather comforting. In doing so, she admires and distinguishes something that normally would be overlooked or cast aside.

Her refusal as a child to see funk as a bad commodity is portrayed again when Morrison writes, "Then the scratchy towels and the dreadful and humiliating absence of dirt. The irritable, unimaginative cleanliness. Gone the ink marks from the legs and face, all my creations and accumulations of the day gone, and replaced with goose pimples" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 15). Instead of being cleaned and made to play with cold White baby dolls at Christmas, Claudia would rather someone give her an experience:

I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mamma's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Pappa play his violin for me alone [...] the smell of the lilacs, and the sound of music, and, since it would be good to have all my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 15)

She does not want a hard Shirley Temple baby doll as a gift. She wants something that would actually appeal to her. In *The Bluest Eye* there is a description of Claudia's hatred of white dolls which emulate Shirley Temple:

Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, "Ahhhhhh," take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauze back would split, and I could see the disk with the six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere round metalness [...] I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of the dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrify thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 14-15)

In rejecting White baby dolls and advocating experiences such as listening to music, smelling and tasting something from nature, while being allowed to keep her smell and dirt on her body, Claudia is advocating a return to what is natural. Instead of ironing out her hair and scouring her body until it looks a shade lighter, she would prefer to revel in her body. Claudia is an eruption of funk. A sporadic and artistic African American girl who wants to listen to music played by African Americans rather than playing tea parties with a white baby doll while wearing a scratchy dress. Morrison uses eruptions of funk to show where African American women can reveal themselves. In the next chapter I will show how Morrison uses her writing to create an environment for an eruption of funk.

3. 6 Literary Technique in *The Bluest Eye*

Morrison writes an African American narrative through a "race free yet race specific prose" (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 169) in *The Bluest Eye*. Writing a novel that includes various narrators, a cyclical structure, and African American language provides a platform for African American women's center staging. Morrison ventures

away from canonical literary technique to ensure that her writing is not influenced by traditional styles and is therefore a unique basis from which to project her vision of African American women. Morrison's writing is politically charged and symbolic. In her essay "Language and Narration in Toni Morrison's Novels," Ryan writes, "Language, she [Morrison] argues, has been used in much of American literature to "powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people (Ryan "Language and Narration in Toni Morrison's Novels" 153). Morrison's separation from traditional literary form and language prove her point that it is only through an African American women's medium that an accurate account of African American women can be told.

3.6.1 Narrative Technique

Morrison uses various narrators, from Claudia as a child, to her as an adult, to Pauline's perspective, and including omniscient narrators. Incorporating so many different viewpoints enhances the reader's insight into the situations presented in the novel. As Agnes Suranyi observes in her essay "The Bluest Eye and Sula:"

The complexity of narration is provided by the switch of the narrative point of view from first to third person and the presence of multiple perspectives; while much of the story telling comes from Claudia as a nine-year old child, she also reflects on the events as an adult. At the same time Pecola's mother is given voice and Morrison herself intervenes as an all-knowing narrator. (Suranyi "The Bluest Eye and Sula"14)

Rather than finding an omniscient 'all knowing' and reliable narrator in the novel, the perspectives presented in the novel are formed through a patchwork of reliable, unreliable, child minded, and adult vantages. Morrison moves away from traditional White purely omniscient narrators to create fragmented perspectives which spider web together and spin the tale of an African American girl's tragic story.

Morrison may use a many narrators, however, she is specific in which narrative perspectives she excludes. Absent from the novel are the viewpoints of men. Therefore the novel of an African American woman is shown through a female perspective. One of the reasons I believe she employs only female authors is present in Ryan's essay "Language and Narration in Toni Morrison's Novels:"

For Morrison – as for other Black women writers-claiming discursive authority is both complicated and necessitated by her impoverished positioning within this racialized and gendered economy. This process is further complicated by the historical positioning of the Black woman as unreliable narrator – someone whose credibility (intellectual, moral, aesthetic) the reader should not, need not, credit. (Ryan "Language and Narration in Toni Morrison's Novels"156)

By using only women narrators, Morrison proves her point that a woman's perspective is as reliable as a male perspective. I believe that she empowers the women characters in her novel through the exclusion of a male perspective because the story is told 'by women about women.'

3.6.2 The Novel's Structure

The Bluest Eye is separated into four chapters which denote the four seasons. The structure of the novel is based on nature's timeline rather than a calendar year therefore separating the narrative from a Western perspective of time. Morrison uses a non-Western timeline to create a structure for the novel which, for her, is better suited as a framework for an African American novel. In her book *Toni Morrison A Critical Companion* Kubitschek argues that:

Toni Morrison's fiction illustrates exactly what makes African American literature African American. African American culture and literature work within the concept of the universe that differs from dominant Western ideas. [...] Toni Morrison has acknowledged the importance of the sacred cosmos to African American culture by saying that she wants her readers to be familiar with "black cosmology" [...] The African sacred cosmos differs from Western models in three important areas: definition of what is sacred, *understanding of time* [emphasis mine], and concept of the self. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 22)

The division of the chapters, according to the four seasons, connects the time progression in the novel to a cyclical pattern in nature. Because the timeline of the novel is non-linear, Morrison succeeds in connecting the themes in the novels to a more 'black cosmology.' Once again she compiles her novel so that it is a text where African American images are presented through a non-Western format.

Even though there is a large commentary as to what the four seasons symbolize in the novel, I wish to limit my discussion to their influence in the measurement of time. The novel begins in the fall, when children, in the United States, prepare for the beginning of the school year, and ends in the summer when children are freed for their vacation. Seeing the connection between the school calendar and the novel gives the reader clues that the topic will focus on the lives of children.⁶⁰ Also knowing that the seasons are a structural technique clues the reader that messages, transmitted through the novel, are ones which will continue unendingly as the seasons continue to come and go. Morrison presents time as something which is continuous and does not follow the Western calendar. As I have argued, the structure of time in the novel according to the four seasons, connects the novel to nature, black cosmology, and cyclical rather than linear pattern all to create a time frame that follows a more African and earthly connected composition. Morrison removes this novel from Western patterns of timelines in order to create a platform where African American women are presented through a more appropriate 'progression.'

3.6.3 Morrison's use of Language

As I have proven in the previous two subchapters of my thesis, Morrison's writing promotes a political undertone. *The Bluest Eye* promotes African American women through an African American platform found in the novel. Language is the medium through which Morrison politicizes her novel and promotes the lives of

⁶⁰ Cf. Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 23.

African American women. In her essay “Language and Narration in Toni Morrison’s Novels,” Ryan states, “Language, she [Morrison] argues, has been used in much of American literature to powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive ‘othering’ of people” (Ryan “Language and Narration in Toni Morrison’s Novels” 153). *The Bluest Eye* is the novel in which Morrison takes her turn to evoke images and hidden signals for African American women. This is Morrison’s opportunity to counteract previous written racialized American literature. By infusing her novel with language that forces the reader to examine the plight of African American women, Morrison politicizes her work in favor of African American women.

An example of how Morrison removes her literature away from canonical White language can be found in the titles she uses for each of her chapters. Each title is a sentence she takes from a Dick and Jane primer. These books are used in schools to teach children to read. The books are comprised of basic sentences which depict a nuclear White family. In her essay “The Bluest Eye and Sula,” Suranyi notes the significance of the inclusion of the primer into the novel:

Since the earliest critical responses, various commentators have pointed out the relevance of the opening Dick and Jane excerpt to both the structure and ideology of the novel. Michael Akward claims that by taking the primer as an intertext (or pre-text), the author [Morrison] revives and at once subverts “the convention of the authenticating document, usually written by whites to confirm a genuine black authorship of the subsequent text. (Suranyi “The Bluest Eye and Sula” 13)

Morrison takes lines out of the primer and uses them as titles. At the beginning of the novel the words are separated, “Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in a green-and-white house” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 1). At the end of the novel the words are chaoticized⁶¹ into one word, “LOOKLOOKHERECOMESAFRIEND” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 152). Finding this deconstruction of sentences and words,

⁶¹ I used the word ‘chaoticized’ to explain how Morrison removes the spacing between the words, punctuation, and capitalization so that the sentence reads as a chaotic mess.

in the titles of the chapters, proves that Morrison's attempts to remove her work from canonical American literature through the language she employs.

The focus of the novel is African American girls and women. As I have proven and will prove further in my thesis, Morrison politicizes her works as a way to promote African American women. To justify this statement, I want to examine a quote from Morrison's book *Playing in the Dark*:

[...] I know about the ways writers transform aspects of language, and the ways they tell other stories, fight secret wars, and limn out all sorts of debates blanketed in their text. And rises from my certainty that writers always know, at some level, that they do this. (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 4)

Morrison is aware of the tools authors use to infuse meaning and message into their works. Authors transmit their agendas through little manipulations of words, structures of sentences, and the order in which ideas are presented in a text. Morrison, like the authors she describes, is conscious of her writing and aware of the political and social commentary she transmits through language.

4. *Sula*

“With its curious origin as a “nigger joke,” the Bottom presents a version of reality that closely resembles a cyclic repetition of the historical injustices perpetuated upon Blacks.” (Montgomery “A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's *Sula*” 128)

Sula is a novel written in progression to *The Bluest Eye*, “In her next novel Morrison continues to deal with black female experience, but the emphasis shifts from childhood to lasting bonding between girls-becoming-women” (Suranyi “The Bluest Eye and *Sula*” 11). What is apparent is that the novel deals with the destruction of an African American community. Morrison set the novel between World War I and 1965 in the fictional village of the Bottom, a town made up of almost purely African Americans, who live according to an unwritten set of rules. The Peace household is a family dominated by strong and independent women who break the rules in their

community by living on their own and not conforming to ordinary roles as mothers, wives, and lovers. The power of the Peace women lies in their sexuality and it is through their 'predatory' encounters with men that they form their identity. This novel differs from *The Bluest Eye* because it is set primarily in the realm of adulthood.

Sula centers on the lives of Sula Peace and Nel Wright. These girls-turned-women function as two parts of a whole entity. Nel is the domesticated wife and the law-abiding citizen where Sula challenges everything to the point that she is presumed to be a witch and evil. In her essay "A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," Montgomery describes the connection between these two women:

Nel [...] assumes the traditional roles the community prescribes and retains her social identity, though her personal identity is non-existent. Nel's best friend Sula, by contrast, is a free-spirited woman whose determination to define herself places her at odds with the Black community. Nel and Sula's complementary relationship offers temporary escape from the tensions inherent in the community's patriarchal structure, however. As outsiders, they find in female bonding the wholeness society inhibits. (Montgomery "A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 132)

When these women work together they create a solidified unit, but when separated, these women are fragmented. The novel does not include global politics in its message as *The Bluest Eye*, rather is a domestic allegory for the African American community. In her essay "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," Nigro argues:

Although Toni Morrison (1973) may not have intentionally created a novel to celebrate the working class or to explore the consequences of work among African Americans, she has in *Sula*, celebrated the lives of ordinary people who daily must work and provide. *Sula* celebrates many lives: It is the story of growing up Black and female; but most of all, it is the story of a community. (Nigro "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 724)

Nel represents African Americans who follow the rules set out for them by White communities and Sula represents the mythic, natural, and historically rooted African Americans who claim their heritage, hence the disputes between Nel and Sula, in the novel, represent the African American struggle to establish a true and coherent identity.

In the novel modernist literature is referenced through the fragmented character of Shadrack and the community of the Bottom itself. Both character and community are fractured and disjointed. Morrison emphasizes their literal and figurative ‘breakdowns’ in the novel to draw attention to problems in the community. In her essay “A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's *Sula*,” Montgomery describes the destruction of the Bottom:

The destruction of the Bottom, a Black community located in the hills above the fictional town of Medallion, Ohio, is a central event in Toni Morrison's *Sula*. With the collapse of a tunnel linking Medallion to a neighboring town and the leveling of the Bottom in order to make room for a golf course, the Black community appears to have reached its inevitable end [...] Natural disasters, unexpected deaths, frustrated dreams, and continued racist oppression serve as bitter reminders of the near-tragic dimensions of Black life, for to be Black in America, the novel implies, is to experience calamity as an ever present reality, to live on the brink of the Apocalypse. (Montgomery “A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's *Sula*” 127)

The destruction of the Bottom is the final ‘breakdown’ of the community. I argue that fragmentation presented in the novel through modernist literary techniques, Eva Peace's rift from the traditional stereotypes of African American mothers, and a community's insistence in creating a pariah of *Sula* all function as allegories for the African American community. In the following chapters I will analyze why Morrison includes references to modernist literature, why she imbeds images of non-conformist African American women, and why there is such a strong focus on the community in the Bottom's reaction to Sula.

4.1 *Sula's* ties to Modernism

Morrison draws on literary modernism and infuses techniques used by modernist writers to create a disjointed feel in the novel which parallels the fragmented existence of individual African Americans and the African American community in the Bottom. I believe that Morrison breaks away from a smooth and unified narrative to connect her novel to the African American experience. The three main modernist literary techniques employed in this novel are: 'stream of consciousness,'⁶² the alienated individual/ character's fragmented experience, and juxtaposition. The incorporation of literary modernism into the novel forces the reader to delve further into the text to understand which messages are being promoted. As argued, African American women's history in the United States has been plagued with incongruous imagery which I believe is accurately paralleled to the structure of the novel.

To clarify 'stream of consciousness' in *Sula* we need to examine the structure of the novel. It is separated into eleven chapters which all follow a progression of years from 1919 to 1965. The novel is relatively short, however, the large amount of chapters makes it choppy to read.⁶³ Also, even though the novel progresses in a linear timeline, the development of the ideas is inconsistent. The omniscient narrator will move from one character to another sometimes returning to that particular character and sometimes characters completely disappear from the text. As Kubitschek describes in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*:

An omniscient narrator usually puts the reader in the position of someone who knows all the characters thoughts and feelings. An omniscient narrator usually puts the reader in the position of someone viewing a conventional portrait or landscape rather than a collage. (In such situations, the viewer can perceive

⁶² A 'stream of consciousness' writing as described by Missy Kubitschek in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* is, "Writing [which] tries to show the actual processes of the mind. Because we do not feel and think in complete, logical sentences, works using stream of consciousness contain partial sentences, many images, and frequent repetition" (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 18).

⁶³ Compare to Kubitschek's discussion in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 49 regarding the structure of *Sula*.

the unity of the whole work with only one glance.) To create the collage-like effect of *Sula*, the omniscient narrator never reveals the thoughts of all the characters at one time. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 49)

The discontinuity created by an omniscient narrator who does not unify the text requires the reader to be more proactive in their analysis of the characters. The reader is then left on their own to discover the significance of certain themes and situations in the novel rather than having the information readily dictated to them. When the reader is more active in the text, they think about possible connections that the novel has with outside events. I believe that Morrison uses this literary technique in the novel so that the reader is required to look closely at its issues and themes. In her essay "Form Matters: Toni Morrison's *Sula* and the Ethics of Narrative," Nissen writes, "[...] *Sula* is the kind of experimental, complex, writerly narrative we often call modernist, the demands on the reader as interpreter and judge are more extensive than those made by, say, one of the Grimm fairy tales or a Dickens novel" (Nissen "Form Matters: Toni Morrison's *Sula* and the Ethics of Narrative" 264). Rather than having the story easily read, Morrison forces the reader to actively think about the characters in the novel and how they might be connected with outside historical links and in particular the plight of African American women.

The second modernist literary technique in the novel is the 'alienated individual' who is present in many of the characters in *Sula*, however, I want to focus on Shadrack and his experience. Shadrack is an African American man who returns to the Bottom after fighting in World War I. As a result of his military experience he suffers a mental affliction and is unable to create a unified semblance of the world:

Laced and silenced in his small bed, he tried to tie the loose cords in his mind. He wanted desperately to see his own face and connect it with his the word "private"- the word the nurse (and the others who helped bind him) had called him. (Morrison *Sula* 10)

Throughout the novel there are scenes where Shadrack tries to hold together the thoughts in his head, however, they are fragmented and incoherent. As a way to regulate his mind Shadrack creates routines which lessen the blow of unexpected

events or thoughts which flood into his brain. The main fear that Shadrack has is of death's unpredictable nature. To quell his fear of death's unexpectedness he enacts National Suicide Day. This is a day on which he encourages all members of the Bottom to either kill themselves or each other. If all death occurred on this day, then he would be free for the next year not to worry about it. Oddly, National Suicide Day becomes part of the Bottom's archetype and the African Americans in the community start to incorporate this day into their everyday calendar. The fragmentation of individuals and the community in the Bottom is a recurring modernist theme in the novel.

The third modernist technique found in the novel is juxtaposition. Morrison often juxtaposes her characters so that the reader is given more than one account of the same event. For example the death of Chicken Little, an African American boy, is retold through Nel and Sula's viewpoints, giving the reader different perspectives and analysis of one event. Both Nel and Sula feel guilty because of their involvement in his death, however their reasons why they feel guilty are different and reflect on their different character. As Kubitschek argues in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, "The "pictures" of *Sula's* collage are separate events or character sketches. Together they show the friendship of Nel and Sula as a part of many complicated, overlapping relationships that make up the Bottom" (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 49). Because of the multiple vantage points which add to the pluralism of the novel, we are given an in-depth yet disjointed look at the events and the community in the Bottom. After I have examined Morrison's literary technique with the three examples of a 'stream of consciousness,' alienation and juxtapositions, I would like to show another one of Morrison's skillful ways of constructing her novels by highlighting the characters she creates.

4.2 Eva the Self-Sacrificing Mother

Eva Peace is a self-sacrificing character in the novel. Throughout the novel, she faces situations which require her to give up a part of herself either physically (when she lays her leg down on a railroad track to collect insurance money) or spiritually (when she plays the part of God and decides to kill her son). Even though she is portrayed as a self-sacrificing mother in the novel, I argue that these moments of self-sacrifice are not completely altruistic. These acts of sacrifice are always not depriving, but often moments of self-empowerment which feed Eva's egoism. To establish the traditional role of sacrifice for African American women let us examine Patricia Hill Collins' description in her book *Black Feminist Thought*, "In many African American communities so much sanctification surrounds Black motherhood that "the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm" (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 174). According to the idea in this quote, sacrifice is an imprinted requirement for African American mothers. Eva does sacrifice herself; however, she makes sure that these acts provide her with gratification. Seeing Eva's egoism complicates the image of the self-sacrificing African American mother because she is meant to behave altruistically. How do we quantify Eva's self-sacrifice if we know she was selfish in her sacrifices?

To answer this question, let us review three main instances where Eva sacrifices herself for the 'betterment' of her offspring. They are: the amputation of her leg so that she can claim insurance money from the railroad company to provide a steady income, killing her son to preserve his manhood, and jumping from a second story window to save her daughter. The first situation of physical sacrifice occurs after Eva's husband abandons the family and she is forced to financially provide for her children. One night, when she is poverty stricken, she finds herself hunched over her son desperately trying to coax a bowel movement from his rectum with the last of the food/lard that she owns. Eva is disgusted by the desperation of her situation:

[...]Eva squatted there wondering why she had come all the way down there to free his stools, and what was she doing down on her haunches with her beloved baby boy warmed by her body in the almost total darkness, her shins and teeth freezing, her nostrils assailed. She shook her head as though to juggle her brains around, and then said aloud, “Uh uh. Nooo.” (Morrison *Sula* 34)

As a consequence, Eva decides to improve her situation. She has decided that she will no longer sacrifice her dignity even to save her children. Eva has put limits as to what situations she will find herself in and it affects her role as a self-sacrificing mother because she will not completely give up everything for her children.

In the novel Eva decides to sacrifice part of her body to ensure that her pride remains intact. She leaves her family, puts her leg down on a railroad track, and it is amputated. When she returns to her children, she has a purse full of money that ensures the well being of her children and she will no longer have to worry about money. In the novel there are elaborate descriptions of Eva’s remaining leg which proves her egoism:

Whatever the fate of her lost leg, the remaining one was magnificent. It was always stockinged and shod at all times and in all weather [...]. Her dresses were mid-calf so that her one glamorous leg was always in view as well as the long fall of space below her left thigh. (Morrison *Sula* 31)

Eva’s character does not fit the role of the self-sacrificing mother as outlined in the quote from *Sula*. Defining Eva as a self-sacrificing mother is complicated because she only performs a sacrifice if it will be to her benefit. Let us look at two more instances of Eva’s ‘sacrifice’ in order to establish how she benefits rather than loses.

The second example of Eva’s sacrifice is when she kills her son to preserve his manhood. Eva knows that her son is a heroin addict which causes him to act as though he is a child. Eva is a proud mother, and seeing the infantile state of her son, disrupts her self-image as a productive mother. Rather than allowing him to continue his behavior Eva kills him in order to save face for her son and herself, “I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man

and not all scrunched up in my womb, but like a man” (Morrison *Sula* 72). In killing her son, Eva favors her ego rather than her role as a mother. Instead of trying to rehabilitate her son, Eva sees him as a failure, and, therefore, she condemns him to death.

Eva assumes the role of God when she kills her son. In her book *Fiction and Folklore*, Trudier Harris provides a good explanation as to what motivates Eva’s behavior and the consequences she must face:

In deciding that her son would be better off dead, Eva recognizes no authority, no morality except herself. Plum’s drug addiction offends her sense of what a man should be [...] Eva becomes the vengeful goddess in destroying a creature who has failed to worship in an appropriate manner at the altar. (Harris *Fiction and Folklore* 74)

Harris’ analysis of Eva’s actions proves that Eva’s egoism overrode her responsibility as a mother. As a repercussion for Eva’s actions another one of her children dies, this time because she is unable to save her. Eva has to pay for her ‘sins’ and, therefore, is forced to watch her daughter burn to death. To explain the horror of watching her daughter burn, let us first examine Eva’s third act of sacrifice.

One afternoon, in the novel *Hannah Peace*, Eva’s daughter, is hanging the laundry. A cinder falls close to the sheets and they catch fire. The fire spreads onto Hannah’s clothing and she is burnt alive. Eva sees Hannah burning from a second storey window and jumps out of it in order to save her daughter. However, she cannot reach her daughter in time and is left to watch her die. Hannah was the apple of Eva’s eye and worked hard to please her mother. Harris describes the relationship between Eva and Hannah, “Hannah, Eva’s oldest child, has served her mother well [...] Thus shaped by the image of the goddess and responsive to her wishes, Hannah earns Eva’s greatest sacrifice” (Harris *Fiction and Folklore* 75). The greatest sacrifice, as Harris describes, occurs when Eva jumps out of the window. She is willing to die in order to save her daughter, when instead she kills her son because she feels that his life is repugnant. I would argue that Hannah feeds Eva’s egoism by being a good daughter,

while her son is an embarrassment. Noting Eva's favoritism we see how she only participates in situations which will produce a favorable outcome and feed her ego.

4.2.1 Eva as the Communal Matriarch

It is safe to assume that Eva chooses the role as a communal matriarch for the attention and boost to her ego. Having a house full of people and wives who come to her for advice, she is assured that she will not be forgotten as she gets older. After Eva Peace returns to the Bottom with one leg and a purse full of money, she buys a house and takes in renters and orphans. Having abandoned her children for eighteen months, she has now returns as a mother to her community and a foster mother to children without parents, a name, or an identity. Not only does she become a foster mother, she dictates the traditional role of a wife to newlywed women, "She fussed interminably with the brides of the newly wed couples for not getting their men's supper ready on time; about how to launder their shirts, press them, etc" (Morrison *Sula* 41). Oddly, Eva never remarries; however, she promotes the traditional role of women. Knowing that Eva does not practice what she preaches, one has to wonder what motivates her to take on this role as a communal matriarch and an arbiter of traditional marriages.

Eva's presence as an othermother, in the novel, is a complicated issue because she fosters numerous children, however, she does not ensure their proper upbringing. I argue that Eva takes on the role as an othermother to promote her status in her community rather than having an avid interest in raising adopted children. To bolster this argument let us look at Collin's description of othermothers:

Motherhood – whether a blood mother, othermother, or community othermother – can be invoked as a symbol of power by African – American women engaged in Black women's community work. Certainly much of Black women's status within women – centered kin networks stems from their important contributions as bloodmothers and othermothers. (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 192)

As described in the previous chapter in Harris' argument, Eva works in terms of worship and manipulation. To see how she finds power in her role as an othermother, let us look at her adopted sons. Eva adopts three boys and names all of them Dewey. Yes, she gives them all a name; however, in naming them all the same, she takes away their capability to develop as individuals.

Eva fusses over and dictates what newlywed wives should do for their husbands. She is reestablishing her role as a wife through these women, in order to regain reverence in her community and as a role model. In helping these wives, Eva is sought after as an advisor and authority as a wife. Eva bolsters her status in the community is by playing the role of the traditional wife. Eva is abandoned by her husband. In order to overcome the shame she feels by this situation, she reclaims her role as a wife by dictating the role to newlywed wives. Again, instead of altruistically involving herself in her community, Eva requires a boost to her ego as payment for her efforts.

Eva's period of egoism as an othermother and advisor to women is short lived. When Sula, her granddaughter, returns to the Bottom, she sends Eva to a nursing home which separates Eva from the community she strives so hard to impress. As with the death of her daughter, Hannah, Eva is punished for her selfish intentions. Eva killed her son, Plum, because he was an embarrassment. Eva tries to save her daughter, Hannah, because she worships Eva. Saving her favored child over her embarrassing child proves that Eva has an immense ego and will only exert herself if the outcome is beneficial. Sula destroys Eva's egoism when she institutionalizes her in a nursing home and away from her community. Before I address the complicated relationship between Sula and Eva, I want to analyze Eva's egoism more deeply.

4.2.2 Eva as the Pragmatic Mother

I would like to argue that Eva functions as an egoist. However, there are arguments which counteract my statement that Eva works solely for her benefit. If we revise Eva's performance as a bloodmother, we could argue that Eva functions as a pragmatic mother. A pragmatic mother is a mother who is forced, by situations, to react in a way that will protect her children. Left with this perspective, it seems as if it is the desperation of the situations she encounters, rather than ego, which motivates Eva's behavior.

Looking at Eva as a pragmatic mother is unsettling because it questions the assumption that Eva is motivated purely by ego. For proof let us look at a passage from the novel where Eva defends her role as a pragmatic mother:

No time. They wasn't no time. Not none. Soon as I got one day done here come a night. With you a coughin' and me watchin' so TB wouldn't take you off and if you was sleepin' quiet I thought, O Lord, they dead and put my hand over your mouth to feel if the breath was comin' what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer? (Morrison *Sula* 69)

Eva defends her parenting. She barely had the time to think needless to say worry about if she was being a proper parent. In her essay "A Hateful Passion, a Lost Love," Hortense Spillers writes, "It could be argued for instance, that Eva sacrifices Plum in order to save him, and however grotesque we probably adjudge her act, inspired by a moral order excluding contingency and doubt, no such excuse can be offered in Sula's behalf" (Spillers "A Hateful Passion, a Lost Love" 315). Although Eva acts egoistically when she becomes the communal matriarch, in comparison to Sula, she is still a woman who follows certain societal norms which make her a pragmatist. In the next chapter I will compare these two main women characters and their relationship. What has been important to note in this section is how Morrison creates Eva with such complexity that she is able to incorporate three different forms of maternity all in one

mother and the reader cannot be completely sure of Eva's intentions as a blood and othermother.

4.3 Eva versus Sula

The discrepancy between Eva and Sula is an allegory for the relationship between two different generations of women. Eva is a woman of the 1920s where Sula represents women of the 1960s. In the novel, Eva and Sula are juxtaposed to show two different forms of 'woman power.' Eva finds her power through her role in her community as an othermother and as an advisor to newlywed women where Sula finds her power not within her community, but in her rebellion against it. Sula's rebellion against her community is a fight which many African American women made in the 1960s when they chose not to conform to the traditional roles as daughters, mothers, and wives.

During the politically charged 1960s African American women found themselves conflicted in their traditional gender role. The predominance of the Black Power Movement often overrode their struggle as women. In their book *Gender Talk*, Cole and Guy-Sheftall describe the conflict African American women faced when trying simultaneously to support the African American cause and their plight as women:

There was an explicit message in Black national discourse about the destructive aspects of feminism and Black women's quest for liberation. It was very simple. Feminism is a white middle class movement that retards racial unity and draws women away from their more urgent work – eradicating racial oppression. (Cole and Guy-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 84)

In her rebellion against her community, Sula fights against her race to promote her gender. She does not want to follow a traditional role where she is dependant on men for her success. She goes to college and returns to the Bottom determined to live outside and not inside the community. This rift from the Bottom symbolizes African

American women's split from the Black Nationalist movement to secure their power as women.

Eva does not wholeheartedly conform to her community's perception of a woman's role. Like Sula she shows incredible determination and strength. In the novel there are moments when Eva and Sula's strength is paralleled. One particular instance when they show similar character traits is in their self-mutilation. Where Eva is willing to sacrifice her leg in order to ensure the economic survival of her family, Sula is willing to cut off the tip of her finger. She does this to prove to them that she will not be bullied by boys. Sula cuts her finger to prove to a group of boys, who try to harass her, that she is as tough if not tougher than they. In her essay "Intimations of Matriarchal Age: Notes on the Mythical Eva in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," Janice Sokoloff describes the connection between Eva and Sula and their self-mutilations:

The difference, and similarity, between the two [Eva and Sula] may be most vividly seen in the way each uses self-inflicted violence. Eva's self mutilation, for insurance payments, was to provide for her family. In a strikingly similar impulse, Sula, using Eva's paring knife, cuts off her finger tip to defy taunting teenage boys who persecute her and Eva. (Sokoloff "Intimations of Matriarchal Age: Notes on the Mythical Eva in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 432)

Eva and Sula interact on a very complex level. Eva, even though she wishes to be independent of men, still upholds certain standards of her community while Sula wishes to be to completely contradict her community. Eva lost her leg to provide an income for her family, while Sula cuts off her finger-tip purely to prove a point.

Eva and Sula have different attitudes towards their communities. While both women remain independent and economically free from men, Eva tries to maintain a connection with her community's mandates where Sula completely disassociates herself. Eva is what Cole and Guy-Sheftall call an "everyday feminist:"

[...] "everyday feminism," [is] an awareness on the part of African American women of gender oppression. It emerged in accounts of their determination to take care of their families, sometimes as single parents, and in their

commitment to teach their sons as well as their daughters to question and challenge male privilege. This “everyday feminism” came out of the context of Black women’s daily lives in a racist society. (Guy and Cole-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 33)

Eva does not fully promote that her daughters veer away from traditional roles as mothers and wives, however, in her eccentric behavior and her women-headed household, she advocates that her daughters take charge of their own lives. Eva is an “everyday feminist” because she is determined to ensure the survival of her children without the help of men. Sula moves a few steps further from “everyday feminism” to become a full-fledged feminist.

Eva and her daughter Hannah are unconventional women in their communities. They are women who are also influenced by the gender roles of the 1920s and 1940s. While both of these women choose to live independently, without men, they still do not ruffle the conventional feathers of their communities. In his book *The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Patrick Bjork describes the traditional roles both Eva and Hannah were meant to uphold:

[...] both Hannah and Eva are inextricably linked to the ordering principle of the Bottom, and in spite of Eva’s outlandish and taboo behavior, neither character genuinely threatens the essential fabric of the neighborhood; they accept similar conventional values. (Bjork *The Novels of Toni Morrison* 67)

Both Eva and Hannah are required to follow certain social norms because of the time period in which they grow up. Sula, however, is a woman of the 1960s where feminism has progressed past “everyday feminism” to a more radical movement. To describe the conflict between Eva and Sula this is what Washington’s has to say about the difference between the two generations in her book *Black Eyed Susans*:

The conflict is basically between the idealists (the daughters) and the pragmatists (the mothers and grandmothers). We see the mothers in these conflicts as the ones whose lives are spent struggling for the necessities – food, or clothing, or a place for them to live [...] they do not in turn understand, turning their backs on the things the mothers have struggled a lifetime to gain. (Washington *Black Eyed Susans* xxiv)

Sula is the 'idealist daughter' who chooses freedom from children and husbands. Eva is the pragmatic mother who does not understand why her granddaughter would not want children and a husband.

Sula is not faced with the same choices that Eva had to deal with. Growing up right before and during the 1960s she is allowed to question the traditional role of women. Eva finds her granddaughter to be selfish by not wanting children and a husband. Again, to examine the generational gap between these two women, let us focus on a conversation between the two women depicted in the novel:

Eva: "Well, don't let your mouth start nothing that your ass can't stand. When you going to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you."

Sula: "I don't want to make someone else. I want to make myself."

Eva: "Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around with no man."

Sula: "You did."

Eva: "Not by choice."

Sula: "Mamma did."

Eva: "Not by choice, I said. It ain't right for you to want to stay off by yourself. You need ... I'm a tell you what you need." (Morrison *Sula* 92)

This short dialogue provides us with detailed insight on how these two women differ. Sula decides to stand on her own two feet and live outside her community. It is in Sula's complete independence that she finds her source of power. Eva is unconventional for a woman of the 1920s but is still reserved in her views of family and a woman's role.

Sula's separation from her community shows us an African American woman who promotes her gender over her race. This, for women in the 1960s, the decision often required a drastic leap from their African American communities. It was a bold statement which required personal strength. For example, during the Black Nationalist Movement of the 1960s, there was an issue concerning birth control for African American women which reflects opinions regarding a woman's body. In their book *Gender Talk*, Cole and Guy-Sheftall argue:

[...] one of the most decisive issues generated by Black nationalists was the idea that since Black people were being threatened by genocide, women's main contribution to the revolution would be refusing to take birth control pills and procreating. (Guy and Cole-Sheftall *Gender Talk* 95)

Much like the argument presented by Eva in the previous paragraph, Black Nationalists urged African American women to follow traditional roles as mothers. To surpass the expectations of people such as Eva and Black nationalist men, African American women like the character of Sula had to almost sever themselves completely from their community.

As a final move towards separation from the African American community of the Bottom, Sula commits Eva to a nursing home. This is an unforgivable act for the African Americans and they see Sula as disregarding part of her ancestry. As Sokoloff argues in her essay "Intimations of Matriarchal Age: Notes of the Mythical Eva in Toni Morrison's *Sula*:"

Morrison asserts, "When you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself. I want to point out that nice things don't always happen to the totally self-reliant if there is no conscious historical connection [...] Sula, in an act unprecedented in the Bottom, has her formidable grandmother "put away" in Beechnut Hill, nursing home. Following this reversal of legal guardian roles, Sula, in accordance with Morrison's statement on killing the ancestor, dies. (Sokoloff "Intimations of Matriarchal Age: Notes of the Mythical Eva in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 430)

Sula disregards her ancestry by putting Eva in the nursing home. However, I would argue that by separating Eva from the community she frees herself from being tied down by traditions; for example, Eva's insistence that Sula wed. Similar to some African American women's refusal to follow Black National or traditional mandates, Sula, like these women, drastically separates herself from her community.

4.4 The Destruction of the Stereotypes in *Sula*

In *Sula* there are three women characters who function outside of the realm of stereotype and, in turn, discredit the assumption that stereotypes of African American women are plausible mechanisms for defining her identity. To conceptualize the independence of these three women characters, we need to examine which stereotypes they deconstruct. In the novel there are references to the aforementioned stereotypes in chapter 2.6 of the Mammy, the Matriarch, and the Jezebel. However, as Mary Helen Washington attests in her book *Black Eyed Susans*, “Eva is one of the most complex black mothers in literature. Because she cannot be easily explained or neatly categorized, she defies the stereotype” (Washington *Black Eyed Susans* xxiii). In this novel, Morrison’s characters are so complex that they cannot be quantified in terms of stereotype. As I mentioned in previous chapters, Morrison politicizes her work through her characters. The political statement that she is making, with the complex women in *Sula*, is that these women do not conform to stereotype, therefore, the concept of what being an African American woman entails has to be renegotiated.

As I delineated in previous chapters, a mammy is an African American woman who serves her White family and promotes the lives of the white oppressor rather than her own race. In *The Bluest Eye* Pauline exemplifies the image of the mammy. However, in *Sula* there is no female character who chooses this path. As an example Eva decides to amputate her leg to ensure that she will not be employed as a domestic servant. In her essay “In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*,” Nigro explains Eva’s defiance of this role even though the Bottom, the town in which she lives, is plagued by economic difficulty:

The business of survival is an everyday concern for Eva and Hannah, but because they are Black women in the 1920s, the only paid work in Medallion [the white town which borders the Bottom] is as domestics for ungrateful White families or as prostitutes [...] The mysterious loss of Eva’s leg provides a much needed monthly check. (Nigro “In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*” 727).

Eva refuses to serve a White family and in doing so proves that she will not sacrifice her own family for another. As Kubitschek in her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* argues, “Although she talks a conservative game in regard to motherhood, Eva lives quite experimentally. Rather than taking on a low paying job that would force her to spend all her time away from her children, she literally sacrifices part of her body” (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 61). The insurance Eva collects ensures that she will not become a mammy nor will she depend on ‘White folk’ or men for her income. With the money she collects she buys a house and takes in boarders and orphans and consequently promotes the African American community because she is not forced to work as a mammy.

Eva’s defies the role of a mammy and is better termed a ‘complex matriarch.’ I use the term ‘complex matriarch’ because she adopts the role as the head of her household and as an othermother to her community without embodying all the qualifications of the stereotypical matriarch. The particular reason why I term Eva a ‘complex matriarch’ is because her role as a mother is complicated. Instead of promoting all the children she births or fosters, Eva selects which children will progress and which will remain infantile. In her book *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion*, Kubitschek proves this point:

[...] Eva functions as a mother to much of medallion. (Her name suggests the archetypal mother of humanity, Eve.) She adopts stray children, such as the Deweys. Her mothering is not all nurturant, however, When she ignores the three founding boys’ individuality, for example, they do not grow or mature properly. (Kubitschek *Toni Morrison a Critical Companion* 56)

The reason why Eva chooses to promote one child over another is not implicitly clear in the text. One could argue that Eva prefers to promote her daughters rather than her sons as a means for promoting women’s development rather than men’s. Whatever her incentive, what needs to be noted is that Eva works in terms of egoism. As I proved in the last chapter, Eva’s role as a bloodmother and an othermother feed her egoism because she is praised in her community for her role. Once again I argue that Eva is a ‘complex matriarch’ because unlike mothers who strive to promote all of their

children and provide for them so that they will succeed, Eva is successful in her power to promote and destroy her children.

In this chapter I have assessed Eva's role as an 'anti-mammy' and a 'complex matriarch. Now, to finalize my analysis of stereotypes in the novel, I would like to focus on her daughter and granddaughter. Both Hannah and Sula have sexual appetites which could classify them as jezebels. However, the stereotype of the jezebel is one in which an African American woman is powerless. The stereotype was used during slavery, and further throughout history, as an excuse for White men to sexually abuse powerless African American women. However, in the novel, it is through their sexual appetite that Hannah and Sula find power. They control the men of the Bottom with their magneticism. In her essay "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," Nigro describes Hannah's sexual power:

For Hannah, love of men and maleness is physical without guile. She enjoys the company of men and leads the men of the Bottom to her bed. Her loving is described as sweet, low and guileless ... nobody, but nobody, could say 'Hey sugar' like Hannah. (Nigro "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 726)

Hannah and Sula control the men of the Bottom through their sexual appetites and never ask for any financial or physical support from these men. Hannah and Eva have sex with men without displaying any attachment towards them which is empowering for them because they are in control of their own appetites and men are their meals.

The three women in the Peace household: Eva, Hannah, and Sula all deflect traditional stereotypes of African American women by living their lives freely and independently. In her book *Fiction and Folklore*, Trudier Harris describes these women:

The trinity of women who share the spotlight in *Sula* – Eva, Hannah, and Sula – have much in common with this worldview. Their breaks from expected codes of behavior also enable them to transcend the usual depictions of black women in African American literature, thereby debunking numerous

stereotypes and myths. Eva is a slap in the face to all traditional matriarchs, for there is no God-centered morality informing her actions; yet she is paradoxically the matriarch in the power she wields [...] Hannah defies expectations of matronly morality by randomly sleeping with her neighbors' husbands [...] Sula is the epitome of independence; she throws the community's morality back in its face by redefining behavior. (Harris *Fiction and Folklore* 72)

Each of these three women characters defy their community in one way or another. The political allegory for this chapter is that these women function outside of stereotype and through their defiance of traditional roles for African American women, they have found power. The message imbued throughout the novel, is that in order for African American women to regain their power in the world, they need to step away from stereotypes to enable their growth as individuals.

4.5 Pariah and Community: The Influence of Evil

I have proven in Morrison's fiction that she destroys stereotypes of African American women and creates platforms which allow for a truly representative depiction of the African American experience. Another way in which she uses her novel to portray the African American experience is through her depiction of evil in *Sula*. In a conversation with Alice Childress, Morrison describes why she wove the concept of evil into the novel, "I know evil preoccupied me in *Sula* [...] I know instinctively that we [African Americans] do not regard evil the same way as white people do" (Childress "Conversations with Toni Morrison and Alice Childress" 8). As Morrison argues, African Americans have a unique perception and relationship with evil and by writing about this topic, Morrison reinstates that her fiction is purposefully African American.

Sula is the object of evil in the Bottom. What one has to analyze is how the African American community in the Bottom reacts to this evil. Unlike "White people's reaction to something alien [which] is to destroy it" (Childress "Conversations with Toni Morrison and Alice Childress" 8), African Americans in the

fictional town of the Bottom learn to accept and adapt to the evil presence embodied in Sula. As described in *Sula*, “In their [African American] world, aberrations were as much a part of nature as grace. It was not for them to annihilate it. They would no more run Sula out of town than they would kill the robins that brought her back” (Morrison *Sula* 118). The African American community, in *Sula*, realizes that they cannot expel Sula from the town, “The presence of evil was something to be dealt with, survived, outwitted and triumphed over” (Morrison *Sula* 118). Throughout the novel, there are examples of the community in the Bottom’s negotiation with Sula’s evil.

Interestingly Sula’s evil is balanced by the religiously ‘good behavior’ of the African American community in the Bottom. When Sula is around, women pay more attention to their husbands, houses are vigorously cleaned, and parents respond positively to their children. She promotes beneficial behavior by the members of the community because she forces them to counteract her ‘evil.’ To clarify this statement, we need to reexamine an argument presented in the chapters on *The Bluest Eye*. In the *Bluest Eye*, the African American community felt beautiful when they stood against Pecola’s ugliness. Likewise the community of the Bottom performs ‘moral’ acts to appease its sense of goodness against Sula’s evil, “Their [the community of the Bottom] conviction of Sula’s evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to protect one another” (Morrison *Sula* 117). The African Americans in the Bottom bonded together to ward off Sula’s evil. In bonding together they form a strong collective which fights against an outside source and subsequently behaviors improve.

If the community members of the Bottom validate their good behavior in comparison to Sula’s evil, they cannot eliminate her from the community. She is the figure of evil against which they compare themselves. In his essay “The Orderliness of Disorder: Madness and Evil in Toni Morrison's *Sula*,” Bryant compares the role of Sula in her community to that of Hester from *The Scarlet Letter*:

Like Hester's, Sula's relationship to the community is counterpoised between attraction and repulsion. The puritan community ironically depends on Hester's presence to confirm its own vaunting sense of moral superiority, yet it is obligated by the same logic to shun her [...] Both Hester and Sula, therefore, ironically benefit and threaten the communities in which they live. (Bryant "The Orderliness of Disorder: Madness and Evil in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" 735)

Even though Sula's evil is not eliminated from the community of the Bottom, it is still a threat to the African Americans. The community members subsequently band together against this force of evil securing the connection and communication between the African Americans in the community and therefore reinforcing each other's good behavior. Following Sula's death, the community of the Bottom falls apart. Before Sula's death, the community is unified in their preventative measures towards Sula's evil. When she dies their motivation to remain unified is removed.

I believe that Morrison, through the novel, proves her point that evil is viewed differently from an African American perspective as versus a White perspective. In *Sula* evil is something that solidified the African American community's connections with each other and their mutual encouragement of 'good' behavior. Sula's evil is beneficial to her community because it requires its members to fight together against an external threat. However, the African Americans in the Bottom do not completely expel her from the community because they are an African American community and banishing Sula would be White act. Seeing that the African American community in the Bottom does not eliminate evil, Morrison once again takes African American images and creates an African American lens through which to view them.

5. Conclusion

The Bluest Eye and *Sula* are Toni Morrison's first two novels. Even though Toni Morrison is a political writer and politicizes her novels, she is a non-conformist when it comes to popular trends in writing styles and themes. I believe that Morrison ties her work to heightened political climates; however, she carefully crafts her novels

so that the focus of the writing is on the plight of African American women during transitional periods. As I have argued, the reason why Toni Morrison includes certain imagery and politicizes her work is to create a platform where images of African American women are promoted and accurately depicted. Having found very few accurate images and accounts of African American women when she grew up, Morrison chose to write for herself and African American women through their own eyes.

Certain themes resonate through both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* for example the concept of beauty, women kinships, the destruction of the self and the destruction of a community. The primary focus in the two novels is African American women and their development in or alongside their communities. The way Toni Morrison centralizes on African American women and their plight is by using language, themes, and structures in her narrative technique which accommodates and emphasizes an African American and female experience. For example, Morrison includes strong women characters and often very few male characters and even fewer positive images of African American men. In her essay "Pariahs and Community," Roberta Rubenstein sums up Morrison's writing:

Yet despite the doubled oppression, black women writers have celebrated and written eloquently of their sustaining values. Toni Morrison draws from a rich store of oral tradition as well as from her own imaginative angle of vision to illuminate the potentialities for both annihilation and transcendence within black experience. In representing such extremes of possibility, she articulates, while not always resolving, some of the cultural contradictions of black women's-and men's-problematic position in white patriarchal American culture. (Rubenstein "Pariahs and Community" 126)

As I have described in my thesis, the African American woman has been historically Othered because of her race and her gender which left her lying marginalized and on the borders of her community. Morrison's mission has been to promote African American women through a purely African American platform, experience, and perspective.

Through her destruction of stereotypes in her literature, Morrison creates fiction which is truly written for African American women. She creates African American women characters who are either destroyed by or protest against their African American communities. These women characters represent the steps which African American women need to take in order to regain their individual identity. Because the primary focus in her literature is African American women, Morrison moves African American women from their position as the marginalized Other to the center stage. Having these women characters as the focus in her novels gives them a voice with which they tell their story.

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8. Appendix 1: German Summary

The Bluest Eye und *Sula* sind die ersten beiden Romane, die Toni Morrison in den 1970er Jahren während der Zeit der amerikanischen Civil Rights Bewegung und Black Power Bewegung geschrieben hat. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt kam erstmals die Frage auf, welchen Raum afroamerikanische Frauen in dieser Ära des Umbruchs und der Selbstfindung einnahmen. Morrison entschloss sich bewußt, über die afroamerikanische Frau zu schreiben und brachte dadurch deren Stellung in der Rassen- und Genderfrage in den Mittelpunkt. Ihre weiblichen Charaktere verkörpern Morrisons Ansichten bezüglich einer positiven Entwicklung der afroamerikanischen Frau in ihrer Gemeinschaft (oft auch gegen ihre Gemeinschaft), in ihrer Suche nach ihrer individuellen Identität (Self) und ihrem Streben weg von ihrem Status als Randfigur (Other).

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht das Ergebnis von Toni Morrisons Darstellung des Konflikts zwischen Self und Other und die Auswirkung dieses Kampfes auf die Gesellschaft. Es wird untersucht, wie Identitäten konstruiert werden und wie es passieren kann, dass jemand die Position des Other aufgedrängt bekommt. Die Autorin stützt sich in ihrer Analyse der Konzepte "Self" und "Other" hauptsächlich auf die Arbeiten von Michel Foucault und Stuart Hall. In einem weiteren Kapitel widmet sich die Autorin den stereotypen Verurteilen gegenüber afroamerikanischen Frauen und deren Wurzeln, sowie der Entwicklung der afroamerikanischen Autorin und den Themen, die sie in ihrer Literatur behandelt. Die Analyse von *The Bluest Eye* zeigt die Zerstörung einer afroamerikanischen Frau durch ihre Gemeinschaft, während in *Sula* das Hauptaugenmerk auf dem Konflikt der Gemeinschaft mit einer Frau, die sich dazu entschliesst, unabhängig zu leben, liegt.

9. Appendix 2:

Lebenslauf:

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