A New Historicist Analysis of Trauma in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16357675

Abstract

This paper undertakes a New Historicist and Trauma Theory analysis of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye to explore the intersection of historical oppression and psychological suffering in African-American life. Positioned within the socio-political context of 1940s America, Morrison's novel critiques systemic racism, internalised Eurocentric beauty ideals, and the myth of national inclusion. The research uncovers how Morrison weaves cultural history and personal trauma to expose the psychological consequences of racial exclusion, particularly for Black girls. By applying New Historicism, the research situates the novel as a cultural artefact reflecting racialised power structures. At the same time, Trauma Theory reveals how trauma is both lived and narrated through fragmentation, silence, and dissociation. The analysis highlights Pecola Breedlove's descent into madness as emblematic of structural and symbolic violence, exposing how identity is shaped—and shattered—by internalised racism and socio-economic marginalisation. The findings show that Morrison challenges dominant national narratives by centring Black female subjectivity and memory. The paper concludes that The Bluest Eye is not merely a literary text but a radical intervention that calls for reimagining national identity and belonging. Its contribution foregrounds literature's role in historical reckoning, cultural critique, and the pursuit of inclusive human dignity.

Keywords*:* New Historicism, Trauma Theory, Internalised Racism, Cultural Alienation, National Inclusion

Introduction

Toni Morrison is a monumental figure in African-American literature and world literature. Her work is not merely literary but also deeply political, rooted in the collective memory, cultural identity, and historical trauma of Black communities in the United States. As a novelist, critic, and Nobel laureate, Morrison used fiction as a means to reconstruct the often-erased histories of African Americans and to expose the psychological consequences of systemic racism. Her literary contributions are distinguished by a commitment to centring Black female voices, interrogating the legacies of slavery, and critiquing hegemonic narratives of beauty, identity, and nationhood. Miniotaitė (2017) emphasised that Morrison's work exemplifies the evolution of African-American literature beyond protest into a sophisticated interrogation of Black interiority and cultural history. Similarly, literary theorist Baillie (2013) argues that Morrison's narratives challenge dominant historiographies by reimagining history from the margins, insisting on the centrality of Black subjectivity. Among her most studied works, *The Bluest Eye* occupies a critical place in the canon of African-American literature. The novel explores the devastating effects of internalised racism and Eurocentric beauty standards on the identity formation of African-American girls, particularly through the tragic story of Pecola Breedlove. Set against the backdrop of 1940s America—a period marked by segregation, socio-economic disparities, and cultural imperialism—the novel offers a poignant critique of how race, gender, class, and beauty are socially constructed and violently imposed. As she notes in her essays, Morrison's project in this novel was to expose the "unspeakable things unspoken" within the Black experience and examine how narratives of exclusion permeate personal and collective memory.

To unpack the complexities of Morrison's critique, this paper adopts a dual theoretical lens: New Historicism and Trauma Theory. These frameworks are especially suited for examining how Morrison's narrative functions as a reflection of socio-historical realities and as a testimony to collective and individual suffering. As Stephen Greenblatt and other cultural materialists articulated, New Historicism insists that literary texts must be read in the historical and cultural contexts in which they were produced and received (Maza, 2004). Rather than viewing literature as a self-contained artistic expression, New Historicism positions texts as embedded within power structures, ideological discourses, and socio-political forces. Literature, in this framework, is not merely a product of its time—it also shapes historical consciousness. Applying this to *The Bluest Eye*, the novel is understood as a cultural artefact that reflects the racialised dynamics of 1940s America and critiques the ideological construction of beauty, identity, and inclusion under white supremacy. Trauma Theory, rooted in psychoanalysis, memory studies, and cultural criticism, provides a complementary lens by focusing on the psychological and emotional dimensions of suffering. Centre for Substance Abuse Treatment(2014) describes trauma as an experience that overwhelms the subject's ability to process events, often resulting in fragmented memory, delayed response, and identity disruption. In literature, trauma is not only a theme but also a narrative structure, manifesting in repetition, fragmentation, silence, and disorientation. Traverso and Broderick (2010) further emphasise the ethical and historiographical dimensions of trauma, urging scholars to distinguish between acting out and working through traumatic experiences. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* exemplifies these dynamics: Pecola's psychological breakdown, her family's disintegration, and the community's complicity all reveal the complex interplay between historical oppression and individual trauma.

By bringing New Historicism and Trauma Theory into dialogue, this paper demonstrates how *The Bluest Eye* serves as a historical document and a literary exploration of Black suffering. The novel interrogates how structural inequalities—rooted in race, class, and gender—are internalised by its characters, resulting in deep emotional scars and social alienation. It also foregrounds the intersection of personal trauma with collective memory, illustrating how historical

injustices persist through cultural norms and family structures. This paper argues that Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a profound literary intervention that critiques America's exclusionary ideals of beauty and citizenship. Through its nuanced depiction of trauma and its rootedness in historical realities, the novel calls attention to the ongoing psychological consequences of racism. It offers a powerful platform for understanding the enduring struggle for inclusion and recognition in American society. This paper argues that Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a powerful historicist critique of America's exclusionary ideals of national identity and racialised beauty. Through the psychological disintegration of Pecola Breedlove, the novel exposes how internalised racism and Eurocentric beauty standards function as mechanisms of cultural domination that are deeply rooted in historical and structural oppression. By examining Morrison's narrative through the dual lenses of New Historicism and Trauma Theory, the paper contends that the novel reflects and contests the socio-historical forces of the 1940s, a period shaped by segregation, poverty, and consumer capitalism.

The research objective of this paper is to analyse how Morrison weaves historical context and personal trauma into her fictional narrative to critique the myth of national inclusion in American society. It seeks to uncover how *The Bluest Eye* portrays trauma as both an individual and collective phenomenon, shaped by systemic racism, patriarchal violence, and cultural alienation. Specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. Demonstrate how Morrison uses literary devices to reveal the lingering psychological effects of historical marginalisation on African-American identity formation.
2. Explore how the novel challenges dominant historical narratives by centring the lived experiences of Black girls and women.
3. Highlight the intersections of race, gender, class, and beauty in the construction and perpetuation of trauma.

In doing so, the paper contributes to broader conversations in African-American literary studies, trauma discourse, and historicist literary criticism, offering insight into the enduring legacy of racial exclusion and the role of literature in social critique and memory reconstruction.

Application of New Historicism and Trauma Theory

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is best understood not as a detached fictional narrative but as a literary artefact embedded within—and critical of—specific historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. By employing the dual frameworks of **New Historicism** and **Trauma Theory**, one can excavate the underlying power structures, cultural constructs, and psychological scars that shape the characters' realities. These frameworks offer a means to interrogate the visible and invisible forces contributing to the protagonist Pecola Breedlove's tragic dissolution, while revealing Morrison's broader indictment of systemic racial oppression and cultural exclusion. New Historicism, as championed by Stephen Greenblatt, rejects the notion of literary autonomy and instead views literary works as historically situated texts that interact with power, ideology, and discourse. Abu-Shomar(2013) argues that "literary texts are cultural artefacts shaped by the power dynamics of their time," they should be read in tandem with the non-literary texts and ideologies that inform them. In this light, *The Bluest Eye* becomes not just a fictional story, but a critique of mid-20th-century American ideologies, particularly those related to race, beauty, family, and national belonging. The novel reflects the socioeconomic disenfranchisement of African-American families in the North during the Great Migration, when Black families like the Breedloves moved from the South with hopes of better opportunities but instead found themselves ensnared in new forms of racial capitalism and social marginalisation. The Breedloves live in physical and emotional disrepair—a condition that is not merely personal but emblematic of the broader historical condition of Black life in segregated America.

Furthermore, Morrison's interrogation of beauty standards—the idealisation of whiteness and blue eyes—mirrors the dominance of Eurocentric values in media and popular culture during the period. Pecola's longing for blue eyes is not a mere personal fantasy; it is the internalisation of cultural propaganda that deems Blackness inferior. This reflects what New Historicists consider the textual representation of ideology: literature reproduces, negotiates, and resists the hegemonic discourses of its time. While New Historicism helps us situate Morrison's narrative within its socio-political context, **Trauma Theory** allows us to explore how characters psychologically experience and narrate suffering. Caruth (2016) defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena." In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's descent into madness and her eventual hallucination of having blue eyes encapsulate Caruth's theory of traumatic repetition. Her trauma cannot be fully spoken or resolved—it is acted out through dissociation, silence, and fantasy.

Similarly, Schick (2011) distinguishes between **acting out** and **working through** trauma. Pecola's experience is an embodiment of "acting out," where trauma is relived in a repetitive and unresolved cycle. She retreats into a delusional state, believing she has blue eyes and becoming disconnected from the community and even from herself. Morrison uses narrative fragmentation, narration shifts, and silences within the text to mirror Pecola's internal fragmentation and the community's failure to "work through" collective trauma. The Breedlove family itself also reflects intergenerational trauma. Cholly Breedlove was shaped by a childhood marked by abandonment and racial humiliation, including being sexually shamed by white men as a teenager (Hayes, 2015). Morrison does not isolate trauma to the individual; instead, she contextualises it as a product of systemic and cultural violence. This aligns with Caruth's emphasis on the **incomprehensibility and transmission of trauma** across generations, and LaCapra's focus on **structural injustice** as a necessary condition for understanding personal suffering. The narrative makes clear that Pecola's trauma is not incidental—it is systemic, historical, and cultural.

Historical and Cultural Context of *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is situated within a complex historical and cultural framework marked by racial segregation, systemic economic inequality, and the ideological dominance of white American cultural norms. During the early 1940s, the novel presents a detailed literary reconstruction of the socio-political conditions that shaped African-American life in the post-Great Depression era. These conditions were deeply informed by Jim Crow laws, structural racism, and a rigid class system that collectively sustained the exclusion and marginalisation of Black communities (Braveman et al., 2022). Morrison's narrative reflects the historical moment and interrogates and critiques the ideological underpinnings of America's self-image as a democratic and inclusive nation.

The 1940s represented a paradoxical moment for African Americans. Although the Great Migration had led many Black families to northern cities in search of opportunity, these spaces often reproduced the racial hierarchies of the South in subtler but equally damaging forms. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison captures this systemic inequality's spatial and material realities. The Breedlove family's home, described as "a storefront that does not belong to them" (Smith, 2012), is a literal and symbolic marker of dispossession. It reflects the persistent exclusion of African Americans from stable housing, land ownership and dignified living conditions. This domestic instability is inseparable from the larger economic system that undervalued Black labour and entrenched poverty along racial lines. Pauline Breedlove's employment as a domestic worker in a white household, where she finds a false sense of order and belonging, reveals the exploitative racial dynamics that shaped the labour market (Hatoum, 2023). Her adaptation to the white

household—at the expense of her own family—demonstrates how economic survival often necessitated complicity in racialised labour hierarchies.

Furthermore, Morrison embeds within the narrative the pervasive belief in African-American inferiority, a belief reinforced through both institutional structures and informal cultural practices. Black children attend underfunded schools, families are forced into segregated neighbourhoods, and job opportunities remain limited and exploitative. The social order portrayed in the novel exemplifies what Du Bois termed the "colour line"—a rigid boundary that governed access to resources, opportunities, and full citizenship throughout the early 20th century. Beyond material deprivation, *The Bluest Eye* exposes the cultural hegemony of whiteness and its psychological consequences for African-American identity. Morrison constructs a world in which dominant cultural symbols—magazines, movies, dolls, and religious imagery—uphold whiteness as the normative ideal (Beaulieu, 2003). The recurrent presence of Shirley Temple, blonde dolls, and idyllic white family structures reflects a cultural environment saturated with Eurocentric aesthetic values. These values are not merely superficial; they shape identity formation, influence self-worth, and marginalise alternative forms of beauty and existence. In contrast to other characters, Claudia MacTeer's critical reflections highlight resistance to this cultural indoctrination. Her rejection of white baby dolls and questioning why they are considered beautiful signals the subtle but significant ways Morrison critiques dominant aesthetic narratives. The ideological saturation of white supremacy into everyday life renders it invisible to most characters, but Morrison deliberately brings it into sharp relief through narrative contrasts.

The internalisation of such hegemonic norms functions as a form of cultural violence—what Pierre Bourdieu describes as symbolic power—the imposition of the dominant group's values as universal, which, when accepted by the oppressed, leads to their self-subjugation. In *The Bluest Eye*, cultural violence becomes a more insidious form of oppression than overt physical coercion. It shapes how African Americans see themselves, relate to one another, and imagine their place in the broader social order .Morrison uses *The Bluest Eye* to depict African-American life in the 1940s and to critique the myth of American inclusion and equality. The novel's historical setting—post-Great Depression, pre-Civil Rights era—coincides with an era in which the United States increasingly promoted itself as a bastion of freedom and democracy, particularly during World War II. However, for African Americans, this national self-image bore little resemblance to their lived reality. Morrison's narrative disrupts the celebratory discourse of national unity by foregrounding those systematically excluded from its promises. The structure of the novel itself reflects this ideological critique. The Dick-and-Jane primer, a white middle-class narrative that teaches American children to read, opens the novel in fragmented and increasingly incomprehensible repetitions. This text is a metaphor for the national myth of the American Dream—accessible to some, alienating and unintelligible to others. Morrison deconstructs this ideal by juxtaposing it with the disintegration of African-American families, the psychological collapse of children, and the emotional fragmentation of communities.

By invoking historical memory and reconstructing personal histories of Pauline, Cholly, and others, Morrison situates individual trauma within broader socio-political currents. The novel becomes a counter-narrative that exposes the historical mechanisms by which Black lives have been devalued, misrepresented, and excluded from the national narrative. In doing so, Morrison offers a literary intervention that resists forgetting, compelling readers to reckon with the dissonance between America's ideals and historical realities.

Character Analysis: Trauma, Identity, and Fragmentation in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison constructs a constellation of characters whose lives are shaped by racialised violence, generational trauma, and systemic exclusion. Through their psychological complexities and moral contradictions, Morrison articulates the social and emotional costs of living within a culture that devalues Blackness. The novel's central characters—Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, and Claudia MacTeer—offer a profound insight into how identity is constructed, fragmented, and sometimes destroyed under the pressures of historical and cultural trauma. This section analyses how Morrison presents trauma as a theme and an existential condition that reshapes character, selfhood, and human relationships. Pecola Breedlove stands at the heart of Morrison's critique, representing the most vulnerable casualty of white beauty ideals and internalised racism. Her desire for blue eyes is emblematic of a more profound yearning—not simply to be beautiful, but to be seen, loved, and valued in a society that renders Blackness invisible or grotesque. While this desire has often been read superficially as envy, Morrison clarifies that Pecola's fixation on blue eyes arises from profound psychological displacement and social rejection. Her marginalisation is not limited to race; it is compounded by class, gender, and family dysfunction.

Pecola is routinely shamed for her appearance, ignored by teachers, and ridiculed by peers. Even within her home, she receives no nurturing affection. As a result, she gradually disassociates from her identity, culminating in her descent into madness. Her eventual belief that she has acquired blue eyes signifies not empowerment but total psychological rupture. Morrison does not present Pecola as weak or naive; instead, her breakdown is portrayed as the logical outcome of sustained emotional abuse, societal invalidation, and inherited trauma. Morrison's characterisation aligns with trauma theory's emphasis on fragmentation. Pecola's psyche is increasingly fractured; she speaks in disjointed voices, and her reality is severed from communal and corporeal presence. She is a figure of haunting absence—a child whose body remains, but whose selfhood has been erased by cultural violence. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, embodies a particularly complex portrait of Black masculinity distorted by racism and trauma. His actions—especially the rape of Pecola—are morally reprehensible, yet Morrison offers a narrative that does not excuse but attempts to understand the brokenness from which they emerge. Cholly's life is marked by abandonment and humiliation. As a teenager, he is caught in a vulnerable moment by white men who force him into sexual performance at gunpoint. This early trauma scars him deeply, altering his sense of agency and self-worth. Morrison uses Cholly's back story to explore how emasculation, when inflicted by a racist society, can manifest as violence against the powerless, particularly Black women and children. Cholly turns his rage inward and downward, unable to confront the real sources of his suffering. His alcoholism, volatility, and eventual abuse of Pecola are symptoms of a deeper pathology created by systemic powerlessness.

From the perspective of trauma theory, Cholly's behaviour reflects what Dominick LaCapra terms the repetition of trauma through "acting out"—an inability to process pain, which leads instead to its re-enactment on others. While readers are not asked to forgive Cholly, Morrison's characterisation compels them to recognise the cycle of dehumanisation that breeds further harm within the confines of systemic oppression. Pauline Breedlove represents the tragedy of cultural assimilation and psychological displacement. As a Black woman, she is doubly marginalised—first by race, then by gender. Her employment in a white household gives her a sense of control, order, and, most notably, affirmation. In contrast, her home, marked by chaos and poverty, becomes an unbearable disillusionment site. Pauline's preference for the white family she serves is not simply betrayal—it is a symptom of a society that denies value to Black domestic life and femininity. Pauline's internalisation of white norms leads her to neglect her daughter, ridicule her husband, and reject her cultural heritage. She views her Blackness as a burden and her

deformity as symbolic of her inferiority. This self-loathing is transferred to Pecola, who becomes the mirror of everything Pauline wants to disown. In trauma theory, this transfer of emotional pain from mother to daughter is a hallmark of **intergenerational trauma**, where unresolved suffering becomes embedded in family dynamics and passed down unconsciously.

Unlike Pecola, Claudia MacTeer resists the dominant cultural narratives of beauty and worth. From a young age, she questions the glorification of white dolls and the invisibility of Blackness. She does not idolise Shirley Temple or view blue eyes as inherently beautiful. Her dissenting voice offers a critical counterpoint to Pecola's silent suffering. Claudia becomes the moral and narrative witness in the novel—a character through whom Morrison articulates the possibility of resistance, however tentative, within oppressive cultural systems. Claudia's recollections are laced with guilt, but also with awareness. She recognises the community's collective failure to protect Pecola and understands the mechanisms that led to her collapse. Her act of narrating the story is itself a form of healing—what trauma theorists call the **"working through"** process, where the act of witnessing becomes a means of processing and interrupting cycles of pain. In this sense, Claudia does not merely recall Pecola's story; she transforms it into a communal reckoning.

The Politics of Beauty: Eurocentrism and Cultural Alienation

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a scathing critique of how white, Eurocentric beauty standards function as tools of racial dominance and psychological colonisation. By embedding white ideals of beauty—such as light skin, blue eyes, and straight hair—within popular culture, religion, and consumerism, these standards become normalised and internalised, particularly by young African-American girls. Morrison reveals how this aesthetic hierarchy is not neutral or benign but a deeply political mechanism that enforces social exclusion and self-alienation. Through Pecola Breedlove's tragic desire for blue eyes, Morrison explores the devastating consequences of this internalised gaze and its broader implications on the Black community's self-perception, dignity, and collective identity. Eurocentric beauty ideals saturate the cultural atmosphere in *The Bluest Eye*, primarily through the omnipresence of white imagery in children's toys, advertisements, films, and even religious iconography. Morrison opens the novel with a distorted repetition of the Dick-and-Jane reader—an emblem of white, middle-class family life used in American education—which establishes the ideological backdrop against which Black children are asked to measure themselves. This seemingly innocuous primer serves as a symbol of exclusionary cultural normativity, portraying whiteness as synonymous with order, beauty, and love, while Blackness remains unnamed.

Popular media plays a crucial role in sustaining these ideals. Claudia MacTeer's early rejection of white baby dolls and her resentment toward Shirley Temple reflect an intuitive resistance to the racialised ideals of beauty imposed upon Black children (Wall, 2010). In contrast, Pecola consumes these ideals uncritically, absorbing the message that she is unworthy of love or admiration because of her Blackness. Deliovsky (2008) observes, "the field of representation is where the hegemonic images of white femininity are reinforced as universal standards of beauty." This hegemony, when internalised, enforces psychological disempowerment and cultural estrangement. Even Christian symbolism in the novel contributes to the internalisation of racial hierarchy. God and angels are imagined as white; goodness is associated with light, cleanliness, and whiteness, while sin and evil are coded as dark. These messages, transmitted through religious teaching and iconography, subtly reinforce the perception that Blackness is spiritually inferior. Thus, Morrison's critique is not limited to secular media—it includes institutions such as the church, which are typically seen as moral centres but which, in this context, become complicit in cultural colonisation.

Pecola Breedlove's longing for blue eyes is the most powerful and tragic expression of internalised racism in the novel. Her wish is not merely cosmetic; it signifies a desperate desire to erase her Black identity and be accepted into a world that deems her unworthy. To Pecola, blue eyes represent everything she lacks: beauty, love, security, and visibility. In her mind, if she possessed blue eyes, others would treat her with dignity and kindness. This belief reveals the psychological violence inflicted by white aesthetic supremacy. Morrison writes, "It had occurred to Pecolasome time ago that if her eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she would be different" (Diamond& Morrison, 2007). The equation of beauty with moral and social worth drives Pecola to pray, plead, and eventually descend into madness, convinced she has finally received the miracle of blue eyes. However, her new vision of herself is a delusion born not of healing but of psychological fragmentation. Rather than attaining liberation, Pecola becomes a pariah—unreachable, unseen, and unheard. Her transformation demonstrates what Frantz Fanon describes as the "epidermalization of inferiority," wherein the colonised subject internalises the racist values of the dominant culture and comes to despise their own body and heritage (Song, 2017). Pecola's psychological deterioration is thus a form of racial erasure—not through violence from others, but through the violent self-negation produced by cultural conditioning.

Pecola's tragedy is not unique within Morrison's universe—it is emblematic of a broader crisis of identity within African-American communities subjected to centuries of cultural devaluation. The novel illustrates how beauty standards function as instruments of psychological warfare, undermining Black self-worth and perpetuating cycles of shame and alienation. The effects are particularly acute for Black girls, who are often excluded from the category of "beauty" altogether and are forced to define themselves against a white ideal that is unattainable and destructive. This alienation extends beyond the individual to the familial and communal. Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, mirrors her daughter's sense of displacement. Her absorption into a white household reinforces the idea that dignity, order, and admiration can only be found in white spaces. As she distances herself from her own family and internalises white standards of domesticity and appearance, she inadvertently reproduces the same forms of rejection and emotional violence that shaped her self-image. At the communal level, Morrison indicts the Black community for its complicity in perpetuating these ideals. The laughter, gossip, and shaming that Pecola endures do not come solely from white individuals—they are reinforced by members of her racial group, who have also internalised white supremacist standards. This dynamic reflects what Toni Morrison has elsewhere described as "the brutality of internalised racism," in which the oppressed become agents of their devaluation (Tasnim, 2020).

Narrative Structure and the Literary Representation of Trauma

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison transcends traditional narrative forms to mirror trauma's fragmented, disjointed nature. The novel's structure itself—non-linear, multi-voiced, and at times, incoherent—serves not just as a stylistic choice but as a deliberate literary strategy to communicate what trauma theorists have called the **unspeakability** and **non-representability** of deeply wounding experiences (Kim, 2024). Morrison's manipulation of narrative time, perspective, and voice becomes a vehicle for representing characters' inner lives whose pain cannot be adequately captured through conventional storytelling. Trauma in the novel is not just a theme; it becomes the very mode of narration. One of the most striking features of Morrison's narrative is its **discontinuous structure**. The story is not told chronologically, nor from a single viewpoint. Instead, it weaves through the memories of Claudia MacTeer, third-person narration, internal monologues, and communal voices. This fragmentation reflects the characters' internal chaos and broken subjectivity, especially Pecola, whose life does not unfold in a coherent arc but in ruptures and silences. Barnaby (2012) explains, trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be

fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly." Morrison's fragmented storytelling mimics this repetition and disorientation, making the reader feel the temporal and emotional disruption that defines traumatic experience.

Moreover, the novel's fractured narrative parallels the **dissociative nature of trauma**. Just as Pecola disassociates from herself, so does the narrative disassociate from conventional time and space. Events are told and retold through varying perspectives—each adding layers to our understanding, highlighting the **elusiveness of truth** when filtered through trauma. The absence of a singular authoritative voice speaks to the communal failure to protect Pecola and the collective repression of her suffering. Morrison's ironic use of the Dick-and-Jane primer at the novel's beginning exemplifies how structure is used to deconstruct American cultural myths. Initially presented in clear, idealised prose—"Here is the house. It is a green and white house…"— The primer progressively devolves into an unintelligible stream without punctuation or spacing. This progression parallels Pecola's mental deterioration and highlights the disconnect between the white, middle-class vision of American life and the lived experiences of Black children like Pecola. The Dick-and-Jane passages serve a dual function: on one hand, they symbolise the hegemonic narrative imposed on all American children—a sanitised, uniform vision of happiness, order, and whiteness; on the other hand, they become a **tool of narrative resistance**, exposing the absurdity and exclusivity of this ideal (Smith, 2012). By juxtaposing the sanitised primer with the raw, painful realities of Black life, Morrison destabilises dominant narrative forms and questions whose stories can be told and preserved in national memory.

The use of multiple voices—especially Claudia's—complicates the reader's access to the story. Claudia is both a participant and a retrospective narrator, as a **narrative witness** to Pecola's decline. Her voice offers moral reflection, social critique, and communal guilt. Claudia admits that Pecola was sacrificed to preserve the community's fragile sense of self-worth: "We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness... her inarticulateness was the only voice of our worth" (Roa, 2024). This recognition underscores the idea that trauma is not isolated but collective, and its narration can be both redemptive and indicting. Silence, too, plays a central role in the narrative. Pecola, the victim at the novel's centre, is largely voiceless. She speaks very little and is often spoken about rather than to. Her silence is an absence and **a symptom of cultural and psychological erasure**. In trauma theory, the inability to articulate pain is itself a hallmark of traumatic suffering. Pecola's silence forces the narrative to circle her, emphasising the impossibility of fully capturing her inner world within language.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye is a literary intervention that exposes the fractures of American ideals of inclusion, beauty, and national identity. The novel uses a layered narrative structure, psychologically rich characters, and an unflinching portrayal of trauma to interrogate exclusion's historical, cultural, and ideological foundations. Morrison transforms Pecola's suffering into a critique of a society that upholds white norms as the standard for humanity, beauty, and citizenship. By applying New Historicism, Morrison reveals how The Bluest Eye functions as a cultural artefact deeply embedded within the power dynamics and racial ideologies of 1940s America. The novel challenges the legitimacy of national myths that exclude rather than embrace difference by juxtaposing the idealised world of the Dick-and-Jane primer with the brutal realities of Pecola's life. Trauma Theory illuminates the novel's exploration of psychological fragmentation, silence, and memory. Morrison's formal choices mirror the disorientation and dissociation characteristic of traumatic experience. Central to Morrison's critique is the politics of beauty and the devastating impact of Eurocentric standards on African-American self-perception. Pecola's yearning for blue eyes reflects a longing to be seen and valued in a world that denies her dignity.

Morrison demonstrates that beauty is not neutral but is political, racialised, and historically situated. The insights drawn from The Bluest Eye extend beyond literary analysis into broader social and cultural discourse. Morrison's vision calls for a more just and inclusive world where every voice matters, and every child, like Pecola, is worthy of love, dignity, and remembrance.

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