The Child's Perspective in the Literature of the Marginalized

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Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti – prevoditeljski smjer i pedagogije

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Diplomski rad

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to analyze the strategy of using a child's perspective in literary works concerning marginalization and discrimination of certain groups in the society. The thesis discusses the authors' choice of a child narrator and the effect it had on readers. Therefore, special attention is paid to the interpretation of social phenomena such as marginalization, racism, gender discrimination, and the effect that they have on child's everyday life and family relationships, personality development, and psychological states. The main source used for the analyses is the novel *The Bluest Eye* written by Toni Morrison.

Keywords: child's perspective, marginalization, racism, ethnocentrism, *The Bluest Eye*.

Introduction

For centuries writers have used their art in order to bring forth important questions of their society and used different methods in doing so. One of those methods was introducing various narrative techniques and perspectives in order to increase the effect of their literary works on the readers. The aim of the thesis is to explore the efficiency of usinga child's perspective in works related to marginalization of minority groups in the society. The thesis examines both positive and negative aspects of such approach. It also examines in which way the child's perspective opens new horizons for understanding of the literary work and how it affects the readers. The main assumption is that a child's perspective is especially fruitful for describing marginalization on a micro-level and its consequences on individuals and their everyday lives.

According to Rosenblatt, novels written by African American authors about African American families are a useful source of knowledge and observations about the impact of racism on families and their everyday life, a field that is yet not thoroughly researched, and they may offer an answer to the question "how racism may come home to everyday African American family life" (2). Further, Rosenblatt notes that novels can sometimes offer an even more insightful view of the influence of marginalization on individuals and their life than social science because they include more instances of "individual speech, dialogue, the interior life of individuals, complex and multiply interpretable interactions among family members, and the struggle to make sense of things individually and in interaction with others" (4). The twentieth century produced a number of African American authors whose writing generated a valuable base of knowledge about the African American culture and history, and provided the readers with an insight into the marginalization experience. The works of Tony Morrison (*The Bluest Eye*), Maya Angelou *(I Know Why the Caged Birds Sing*), Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*), or Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mocking Bird*) are just some of the examples that show how not only racism but discrimination from outside and within the marginalized group come home and affect individual lives, often through the eyes of a child. All of the literary works listed above can also be used as basis for the exploration of such a subject, but only one work, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, is chosen for the purposes of this thesis.

The Bluest Eye is a story revolving around and partly narrated by children characters living in Lorain, Ohio in the United States of America in 1941. The children in the novel are African American young girls growing up in a white, male dominated society, facing racism

and discrimination on multiple levels. The story follows the events that take place during one year, but also occasionally goes back to the childhood days of other, now adult, characters. Besides this, literary work, other theoretical works, and researches related to the subject of a child's perspective of marginalization have been used.

The first chapter focuses on a child's perspective in literature in general. Firstly, it addresses the question of authenticity of such an approach and questions if an adult author can ever offer an authentic representation of a child's perspective, or is it always just adult ideas that are hiding behind a child's character. Secondly, it explores most common strategies that the authors use for introducing a child's perspective into their work. The child can be the first – person narrator of the story, or just a character whose story is narrated by someone else. Both of these approaches have their advantages and flaws, which are analyzed in the thesis. Further on, the chapter deals with possible reasons behind the author's incorporation of a child's perspective into their work.

The second chapter relates child's perspective with the marginalization of certain groups in the society. Tony Morrison chose characters that are marginalized on multiple levels. They are African Americans living in a predominantly white society, girls in a world dominated by boys, and children in an adult-centered society. Therefore, they are at the bottom of the "food chain" and hold almost no power in their hands. Yet, this subordinated position gives them the ability to confront the readers with everyday consequences of discrimination on ordinary people's lives. This way Morrison provides her seemingly powerless characters with the power of changing the reader's outlook on marginalization.

The third chapter deals with the micro-level of marginalization as seen from a child's perspective. It explores the consequences of marginalization seen from the eyes of child characters in *The Bluest Eye*, such as the effect of marginalization on family dynamics and relationships between family members, socio-economic status of characters, and their mindset and psychological state. It is especially dedicated to the understanding of internalized racism, which is present in various forms in most of the characters and especially harmful for the children.

1. Child's Perspective in Literature

This thesis focuses on a rather narrow field – the perspective of a female African American child in adult American literature of the twentieth century, to be more exact, in the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Still, in order to explore this phenomenon, a broader outlook on the subject is required. Therefore, it is first necessary to analyze the approach of using a child's perspective in literature in general – how is this effect created in literary works and how it affects the story and the reader. This chapter offers a brief overview and serves as an introduction to more thorough analyses of the chosen literary work in the next chapters.

Before anything else, the issue of authenticity of a child's perspective in literature written by adults must be mentioned. The authenticity issue transcends literature and includes various fields of studies about children. The question is whether an adult can ever gain a genuine insight into child's ideas, thoughts, and perceptions of the world around them and their own lives, or is it just an attempt to guess and approximate a child's way of thinking. In other words, the reader might be suspicious if the narration reflects an adult's, and not a child's, perception. Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, and Hundeide explore this issue and state that the term child perspective became almost meaningless since it is used inconsistently in a wide variety of meanings to the extent that it questions its use in any scientific discourse (20). Therefore, one has to distinguish between child perspective and child's perspective. A child perspective can be defined as "direct adult's attention towards an understanding of children's perceptions, experiences, and actions in the world" (Sommer et al. 22), whilst a child's perspective would "represent children's experiences, perceptions, and understanding in their life/world" (Sommer et al. 23). A child perspective is, therefore, an adult's creation and through it children become objects rather that subjects in their own lives and narrations (Sommer et al. 22, 23). Following this line of thought, an adult author can never offer true children's perspective in their work. They can only make an attempt to guess, remember, or mimic a child's point of view and reasoning. Genuine children's perspective can only be obtained in works actually written by children. Since the novel *The Bluest Eye* is written by an adult author, it can only mirror their own ideas and motives and therefore only offer a child perspective. Accordingly, it is important to note that such literary works can be used in order to explore a child's status in the society and learn about different childhoods at a certain time and place in history. This means that such works can be useful for understanding the society and the context more than understanding the child itself.

Also, an author can use different devices in order to introduce a child's perspective into the literary work and do it with a multitude of purposes in mind. Therefore, searching for common characteristics in works featuring child's perspective is a rather difficult feat. Authors' cultural background, personal experiences, and beliefs form the way in which they construct their characters. For example, if authors come from a culture that renders children as naïve, they are likely to mirror their culture's attitudes and also portray their child characters as naive (Steinmetz 51). Terms "child" and "childhood" are social constructs and their meaning varied vertically throughout historic periods and still varies horizontally across cultures. The idea of a child from the Middle Ages or the Industrial Revolution is very different from the contemporary idea of a child in the twenty-first century. Also, childhood spent in a small African village can hardly be compared to the childhood experience of a child attending a private daycare in the heart of London. Further on, the category of children is too wide to be marked by strict common features. The portrayal of a character depends on their age, life circumstances, personal traits and character, level of education, and many other features. This means that labeling literary works that offer a child's perspective with a fixed set of characteristics would be one-dimensional and discriminating against children, therefore producing an effect quite opposite than the one that the authors of such works in most cases intended.

Also, the author is not the only one who participates in the construction of meaning; it is rather a triangle made up of the author, the character, and the reader: "Expression, comprehension and response of reader and narrator vary, according to age, social and ethnical background of the child narrator, writer, and *reader*" (Steinmetz 51). This adds even more complexity to the issue since the interpretation of the work highly depends on the reader and renders it almost impossible to extract set characteristics of this type of literary works.

After this has been noted, one of the first elements to consider is in which way can an author present the child's perspective in a literary work. Since the thesis focuses on a novel that is predominantly based on a child's perspective and children are the protagonists of the story, three strategies are most relevant: child as first-person narrator, child as protagonist, but with the events being recounted by a third-person omniscient narrator, and the "multiple vision" strategy (Vogrin 81).

The first-person narration allows the reader to "experience the fictional world from narrator's eyes and ears and nose and skin" (Vogrin 80). The main advantage of this approach is intimacy since there are no obstacles between the character's inner world and the reader, but it can also be limiting in certain situations because readers cannot remove themselves

from the character to gain a wider view of the story and are dependent on the character's vocabulary and intelligence (Vogrin 80-81). This can be even more relevant when it comes to child's narration since children's vocabulary tends to be somewhat limited and they sometimes lack life experience, education, or common knowledge that the adult reader might possess. Another question, according to Vogrin, is the reliability of the narrator since all first-person narrators are somewhat unreliable and, whether they do it purposefully or unconsciously, always offer their own version of the events (84). This argument can also be supported by the philosophical idea about the nonexistence of a single, static, knowable reality and therefore there can be no such thing as a reliable first-person narrator (Vogrin 85). According to Steinmetz, a child's first-person narration can be additionally challenging for the adult reader because the narrator is in the position of power. The narrator selects the information and the manner in which they are presented to the reader(22). The other approach mentioned is the third-person omniscient narrator (Vogrin 86). Basically, the narrator reveals single character's thoughts, feeling, and perceptions and has an insight into their mind but recounts the story through third-person narration. This way, the author escapes the limits of the first-person narration since they are not bound by the character's verbal skills, knowledge, or intellect, but still achieve the reader's empathy and identification with the character. Along with these two strategies, which most directly communicate the child's perspective, there are also other, more complex, strategies. The third option mentioned is the "multiple vision" strategy in which case the author offers the point of view of more than one different character. The narration can, in this case, be told in first or third person, and the main advantage is adding more dimension, complexity and flexibility to the story (Vogrin 87).

Toni Morrison was aware of the difficulties and advantages of using a child narrator. Therefore, she opted for a multiple vision strategy in *The Bluest Eye*. The story starts with a first-person narration, but then switches to a third-person omniscient narrator. Narrators keep alternating, and some parts are even written in form of diary entries, like the part about Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola's mother, and in form of letters, such as the letters that Soaphead Church writes directed to God. The main character of the novel is an eleven-year-old girl named Pecola, and her story connects all the other characters and events in the novel; yet the reader can never gain insight into her perspective in the form of a first-person narration. Her behavior, thoughts, ideas, dreams, and experiences are always described by those around her or by a third-person omniscient narrator. In the "Foreword" of the novel Morrison explains why she chose such an approach and states that life conditions of her protagonist, Pecola, made her into a "narrative void" and for this reason she "…invented friends, classmates, who

understood, even sympathized, with her plight…" (X). This means that Pecola was weakened by racism and discrimination in the society on the one hand, and the lack of support, and abuse she experienced in her family on the other hand, to such a degree that she was unable to carry out this powerful and emotional story on her back. In order to help her, Morrison added voices of other characters who could understand her, put the pieces together, and tell her story: "One problem was centering the weight of the novel's inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing. My solution - break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader" (Morrison "Foreword" XII). As seen from this, Morrison chooses her narrators in order to make a stand and actively include her readers into the story. She did not want to induce pity, as she believed would happen if tragic events of Pecola's life were recounted in her own words - this would be too easy for the readers. It is much harder to recognize the faults in the society that led to those tragic events and take responsibility for participating in such a system.

Therefore, the first part of the novel is narrated by a nine-year-old girl named Claudia, Pecola's friend. Still, faced with the already mentioned disadvantages of using a child narrator (limitations in vocabulary and experience, or limited understanding of the adult behavior), Morrison, at certain situations, makes her characters go beyond first-person child's perspective. For example, at the beginning of the novel Claudia talks about her illness and says: "My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "take holt" (10). First of all, the language, vocabulary, and the sentence structure in this example are not typical for children. Some expressions and phrases are overly poetic and some parts of Claudia's vocabulary are unusual in respect to Claudia's age, level of education, and experiences described in the novel. At one occasion, Claudia mentions that adult's conversations sound like a secret code or a foreign language to her, yet she mostly uses adult language and ways of expression in her own talk. She is also, as seen in this quote, looking back on events with adult-like reasoning and understanding. This indicates that Morrison perhaps struggled with her child narrators because the messages she wanted to convey to her readers were sometimes hard to express in child's words, so at certain situations she gives her child characters adult-like features of talk and thought. Still, Morrison also uses colloquial language and inserts mistakes common for children, in order to provide balance and make her characters more believable. For example, when Pecola gets her first

menstruation, Claudia's sister, Frieda, uses and repeats the false term "ministratin" (31). At the same time, Claudia is, due to her lack of experience and knowledge, completely clueless of the subject and thinks Pecola is dying. This shows how child's narration demands from readers to get involved and read between the lines in order to understand and make sense of the events. Readers have to use their own knowledge and life experiences in order to understand the meaning and function of the blood. In other words, readers cannot take the words and ideas of child characters for granted and need to actively participate in making meaning.

The next part of the novel is told by the third-person omniscient narrator. This strategy is used in order to describe places and events that are outside of Claudia's reach. Also, Claudia's part of the story can be narrated by Claudia herself because she is mentally stronger than Pecola due to different life conditions, family situations, and events that they encounter. Pecola's story is far too tragic and complex and when the story switches to Pecola's family, the narration is taken over by a third-person narrator. Using this strategy, Morrison provided the reader with the intimacy, spontaneity, and directness of a first person narrator but also with the more factual approach of an omniscient narrator that is not bound by time and place. This narrator can get into Pecola's mind and see, hear, and feel everything that she does. It is well exemplified in the stances where Pecola's physical and emotional states are described: "She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow" (Morrison 45).

This kind of narrator can also reach into the history and tell stories about the youth and childhoods of other characters, such as Pecola's parents. It results with a multidimensional and well-rounded story, which, through narrations of and about ordinary people, carries a universal message about discrimination, family, and society.

Further on, it has already been stated that each author has an individual set of motives (which highly depend on the context of their creation), for choosing a child's perspective in their work. Still, there are some universal motives for presenting the child's perspective in a text, and this method has certain universal effects. Steinmetz, for example, notes that the success of the whole literary work and whether readers are able to relate to the story largely depends on the narrator and its likeability (22). Reissenweber supports this and adds: "The more you manage to make your characters feel real, to create the illusion of an actual person on the page, the more likely your reader is to fall into the story, past the language and the

words, letting the real world recede and be replaced by the fictional world you have created" (26).The reader's emotional response depends on the presented point of view, and they are often appealed to the story if they encounter challenges, emotions, and experiences similar to their own (Steinmetz 22). In other words, there is a higher possibility that the reader will relate to a narrator who bears resemblance to themselves and therefore a higher possibility that they will accept author's ideas and attitudes expressed through such a character. This is the reason why choosing a child narrator might prove to be a success – every human being has once been a child and childhood is a unique experience that all humans share. A young person might have trouble relating to a middle aged or an elderly person, a male reader can find it hard to adapt to a female point of view in a certain story, and cultural differences could make it hard for the reader to understand the narrator's experiences and choices. But regardless of current age, gender, nationality, culture, or ideology, everyone was once a child and can, therefore, more easily relate to child narrators. This way, the author's ideas, especially universal messages, can be accepted amongst a wider, more diverse audience. Steinmetz also adds that "the reader feels naturally compelled to sympathize more readily with a child, than with an adult, because children appeal to the adult's protective instinct" (26). Therefore, adult's instinct to help and protect children, whose core purpose is the sustaining of human species, and typically functions on a subconscious level, can motivate the reader to feel empathy and develop a stronger emotional bond with the child character.

Another argument for choosing a child protagonist or narrator may be related to a psychological phenomenon called nostalgia. According to Hirsch, nostalgia is "a yearning to return home to the past – more than this, it is a yearning for an idealized past – a longing for a sanitized impression of the past" (309). This can be seen as the reason why most adults idealize their childhood and perceive it as a period of bliss, freedom, and comfort and also why humans often perceive the past as more pleasant and satisfactory than their present. One of the studies that support this theory is the *Aging and Emotional Memory: The Forgettable Nature of Negative Images for Older Adults* carried out by Susan Turk Charles et al. The result of the study proposed that older adults display better memory for positive than for negative images (315). Sedikides et al. also states that nostalgia "is capable of generating positive effect, increasing self-esteem, fostering social connectedness, and alleviating existential threat" (qtd. in Muehling and Pascal 100). With this in mind, it is not surprising that many brands recognized the potential of nostalgia and employed it in their marketing strategies (Muehling and Pascal 101). Studies such as *Involvement Explanation for Nostalgia*

Advertising Effect by Muehling and Pascal, but also other studies with an aim of exploring the positive effect of nostalgia in advertising, indicated that nostalgic ads generated significantly more favorable ad attitudes than non-nostalgic ads (111). What can be concluded from these studies' results it that nostalgia "sells" and functions as a motivational factor. Following this line of thought, nostalgia can also be beneficial if the author is trying to convince the reader into considering and accepting the ideas and messages of the literary work. In other words, nostalgia does not only sell products but also ideas, and can become a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled author. As mentioned in the previous section, adults can, due to the fact that they have experienced childhood, identify with the child's perception and this can bring about a feeling of nostalgia for their own childhood. Using nostalgia in order to promote products and brands, the same method might apply to the reader who is more prone to accepting ideas and values that the author is trying to promote through his child character. This does not mean that ideas and literary messages should be packed and sold like material goods, or that psychological tricks should be used on the readers. It is only a possible explanation for the success of a number of literary works featuring a child's perspective.

Also, some authors such as Seraphinoff state that an adult author can choose to express their ideas and attitudes through a child character in order to distance themselves from the message of the literary work to a certain degree. That way they may present ideas that are considered controversial or even unacceptable in a certain context without generating hostility and a social uproar that it otherwise might cause since readers are more likely to accept a child character and "forgive" them on their words (2). As an example of this, Seraphinoff suggests Mark Twain and his novel *Huckleberry Finn*, which was considered highly controversial at the time of its publishing, especially in the South of the United States of America since it dealt with racial issues and offered a criticism of society (2). But in doing so, Twain used the "believable voice of an uneducated backwoods kid" along with bad grammar and slang, which add to the authenticity and further distance the real author from his character (Steele 7). Huckleberry Finn's naïve and simple manner makes author's opinions more acceptable to the mostly bigoted audience. Still, Twain was often criticized for this approach and the critics claimed that one of the paradoxes of Twain's work was the fact that he wanted to criticize the conventional society but succeed in it at the same time (Graff, Phelan 20). The latter was possible because Twain distanced himself from his characters and their controversial ideas and actions. Seraphinoff goes on to offer more examples of the Macedonian minority authors in Greece who faced threats and fear of violence or retribution if they openly voiced their opinions, one of them Petros Vocis (3). Vocis told the story about

the Greek Civil War thorough the eyes of a five-year-old boy whose innocence generated sympathy rather than rage or disapproval in readers, and readers fell under “the spell of the child narrator” and “forgave” him his writing (Seraphinoff 3).

Finally, one of the most important possibilities of child’s perspective in the literary work is that it opens the opportunity to present one character’s micro-world in relation to the society that surrounds it. This is especially successful if the author is concerned with problems that exist in a society such as poverty, discrimination, inequality, violence, and other. This way, the author is able to present the gnarly consequences of societal phenomena and events, but on a more intimate and personal level. They can distance themselves from facts, theory, dates, and numbers by presenting the story through the eyes of someone who is typically not included in decision making, political turmoil, or civic movements but all of the above strongly influence their lives – children. This way, the readers can approach the different side of the story, the one with little to no facts but plenty of emotions, and be more open to the author’s message.

2. A View from the Bottom: Child Perspective and Multiple Levels of Marginalization

The basis for the exploration of the child's perspective in literary works exploring the issue of marginalization is Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. When analyzing the main character of the novel, Pecola, three general features can be extracted - she is a child, a female, and an African-American. In order to explore the child's perspective in relation to the marginalization in the society in the given text, one must first be acknowledged with the context and the socio-cultural and historical background of the story. Morrison's novel was published in 1970, and the story told is set in 1941. Since both the novel and the story are a product of the twentieth century, it is necessary to explore the socio-historical events that took place at the time.

First of all, the child protagonist is African American. Thomas N. Maloney described lives of African Americans in the twentieth century in the United States of America. According to Maloney, even though the political and legal status of African Americans in the USA has improved during the nineteenth century through slavery abolishment and an increase in civil rights, their life conditions and chances in the society were still considerably lower than the white citizen's. At the beginning of the twentieth century a typical African American family would still live in the rural parts of the South, work on farms, their children would typically not be enrolled in the school system, and they would live in a house that they did not own: "In the meantime, they saved, and scratched, and piled away what they could in the rented hovels, looking forward to the day of property" (Morrison 18). This is exactly how Morrison depicted the problem of property ownership and struggle with poverty in the novel. African Americans were also legally segregated from the white community in facilities such as schools, transportation systems, and lodging. One of the main problems that directly affected the lives of African-American children was the inequality in the educational system since "Through the first decades of the twentieth century, resources were funneled to white schools, raising teacher salaries and per-pupil funding while reducing class size. Black schools experienced no real improvements of this type. The result was a sharp decline in the relative quality of schooling available to African American children" (Maloney).

In the early twentieth century, it became more common for African Americans to move to the North of the country, in order to escape harsh life circumstances in the South, and find a better job in the North. Still, employment opportunities in the North did not grant more

civil rights so segregation and discrimination continued. In the novel, Morrison, describes life conditions of a working class African American family: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (17). Powell interestingly notices how the "hem of life" is here measured relative to the white center, pointing at the dominant influence of the white culture (750).In the second half of the twentieth century public awareness in the USA slowly grew and anti-discriminatory laws and policies were enacted, but Maloney warns that studies made in the last decade of the century still indicate a large gap in wealth, health, life expectancy, and unemployment rates between African Americans and white Americans. Toni Morrison accentuates this gap in *The Bluest Eye* by stating: "The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black" (38). Everything stated above indicates that even though slavery had been abolished, discrimination and racism were still rooted in the American society in almost all spheres of life and enforced through the legal system of the country. Since, according to the definition offered in the *Oxford dictionary*, marginalization is a "treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral", it is clear that African Americans represented a marginalized group in the American society. One of the most notable descriptions of racism in the novel is the part when Pecola goes to a store in order to buy some candy and in the eyes of the storekeeper sees "The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness" (48). In the end, the storekeeper is even reluctant to touch Pecola's hand when she hands him the money. There are plenty of other, more direct, examples of racism throughout the novel, but this one is especially significant because it encapsulates the isolation and blindness to African American problems in the society. Toni Morrison, an African American living and creating in the twentieth century, has also experienced this marginalization first-hand. This background deems it easier to understand the context of the story that Morrison chose for their novel and the type of problems that she represented in her works.

Secondly, the protagonist is a female and as such also marginalized in the twentieth century American society predominantly tailored by and for men. In fact, women in the USA were not even guaranteed the right to vote until 1920, and the whole century was marked by feminist's struggle for women rights ("The Feminist Movement in the 20th Century: Introduction"). The two World Wars created the necessity for workforce and women were granted access to jobs, but employment did not largely improve their status in the society and

women continued to struggle with issues such as reproductive rights, pay equity and sexual harassment ("The Feminist Movement in the 20th Century: Introduction"). Over the years, legislation was enforced in order to decrease gender discrimination and improve women quality of life, but equality was still not achieved. Women remained oppressed and, as Michael B. Katz puts it: "on the whole, they earn less than men, end up in occupational ghettos, bump up against glass ceilings, and find themselves, in relation to men, as poor as ever" (65). The laws and the proclaimed ideas changed, but discrimination, just like racism, remained rooted in the society. This is exemplified in the novel through the repeated objectification of women in the society. It is also mirrored in female characters' fascination with physical beauty, especially in the case of Pecola, the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, in whose case this obsession drives her into madness. However, almost all female characters, both adult women and girls, in the novel are repeatedly measured against the society's beauty standards. They are compared to celebrities from the movies, magazine models, and even fiction characters from storybooks or commercials. They are also compared amongst each other and judged by the clothes they wear and their general physical appearance. It is also embodied in the character of Maureen Peal, a new student that moves into town and starts attending the same school as Claudia, her sister Frieda, and Pecola. Maureen is very well accepted into the community and quickly fits in, finds friends and wins over hearts of both adult teachers and her classmates. Still, Maureen's description is almost solely based on her outside appearance – beauty, hair, and clothes, and there is little to no description of her character at first. Later on, when they get to know her, the girls learn that she is far from perfect and cannot grasp what is it that makes her so loved and that they obviously lack – "If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she was—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser" (74). They were still too young and too comfortable in their own skin to understand the secret to Maureen's appeal, and why even they, although not willing to admit it, wanted to be her friends. The reality is, Maureen's personality did not even matter, for she was a "high-yellow dream child with… Fluffy sweaters the color of lemon drops tucked into skirts with pleats so orderly they astounded us. Brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff" (62). Everyone was enchanted with the way she looked and it made Claudia hate and almost fear her, but she comes to realize that "The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful and not us" (74). That *Thing* represents the society's standards for judging women. Her character is put aside, and the thing put forth is her beauty. Maureen's

beauty - lighter skin and expensive, quality clothes does not stem from her natural appearance, but from society's standards.

Another example of female subordination in the society is the prejudice that female characters have to face. On the one hand, men see them as sexual objects even from a very early age, which is stressed several times in the novel – Cholly molesting Pecola, Mr. Henry assaulting Frieda, Soaphead Church's fascination with and abuse of young girls. On the other hand, when women display openness and pleasure in relation to sex, the society condemns and isolates them. Those double standards and the culture of male superiority are depicted by the belief that a girl is "ruined" after a sexual intercourse with a man. After Mr. Henry sexually abuses Frieda, the girls' biggest concern is that she is now ruined. Claudia and Frieda do not fully grasp the meaning of this, but they know another woman who is deemed "ruined" by the society. It is a prostitute known as Maginot Line – "the one who killed people, set them on fire, poisoned them, cooked them in lye" (77). The reason behind such an image is that Maginot Line appears to break all the standards pushed upon women by the society - in relation to her physical appearance, lifestyle, and mindset. The first thing that seems to upset the society is the fact that she opposes all standard of beauty but remains confident about her looks. Secondly, she is free spirited and not afraid to express her identity and emotions. Her laughter is, for example, described as "the sound of many rivers, freely, deeply, muddily, heading for the room of an open sea" (52). Finally, she chooses an unconventional lifestyle and profession, but Morrison refuses to romanticize her prostitution - she is not a victim of cruel circumstance or a naïve, foolish girl, nor is she forced to be a prostitute. This outlook on life makes Pecola wonder if Maginot Line is even a real person. Therefore, one of the strongest and sincerest female characters in the novel is one that is despised and villainized the most. For women in the novel, the only salvation from the discrimination and objectification is old age. They cannot wait to "wrap their heads in rags, and their breasts in flannel" (139) and walk the streets without the fear of being molested. Old age also gives them an excuse to be quirky, angry, and cynical, to be free. The society lost interest in them after they were no longer found conventionally attractive and it freed them from all the standards and rules that they had to follow, finally allowing them to show their own identity.

Another example of discrimination is the difference between Pecola and her brother. They are both equally the victims of the racist society, poverty, their family's neglecting, and violence, but they are, due to their gender, forced to deal with it in different ways. Sammy's strategy is running away from home, and Pecola is restricted in that view because she is a girl:

"Pecola, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance" (43). This endurance meant that she had to develop methods for survival in such conditions, and her unhealthy and dangerous fixation with blue eyes was one of those methods. She could not physically remove herself from the toxic environment so she had to move inside of her own mind and eventually started to believe that her own appearance was the source of all problems.

Finally, the protagonist of the novel is a child, but the understanding of a word child varied over time, place, and social groups. For example, many children in the twentieth century USA grew up in poverty and were forced to work – some of them helped their families in the rural areas and performed domestic chores, but some of them worked in factories or mines ("Teaching with Primary Sources"). The minimum age for employment and work hours for children were not successfully regulated by the government until 1938 ("Teaching with Primary Sources"). Also, being children, their opportunities for participation in decision making in the society, but often even in their own lives, were severely restricted. Aside from the legal and political aspect, children were also marginalized due to the lack of information and knowledge about the world around them, as it is stated in *The Bluest Eye*: "It was certainly not for us to "dispute" her. We didn't initiate talk with grown-ups; we answered their questions" (23). "Her" in this case being the young girls' mother, it is obvious that it was at the time not considered desirable for children to be curious about the adult world around them, and therefore a lot of important information that would grant them better understanding and participating in the society were withheld from them. On another instance, Claudia describes her fascination with adult conversations: "Sometimes their words move in lofty spirals; other times they take strident leaps, and all of it is punctuated with warm-pulsed laughter—like the throb of a heart made of jelly" (15). Claudia and her sister can sense the emotional aspect of those conversations but not the meaning of their words since they are excluded from them and not given any explanations. This is not always even done on purpose, but is rather a consequence of adults undermining children's abilities and, in doing so, segregating them into a distinct caste in the society – the one with least power in their hands. It is also interesting to note that in the novel the term "becoming" is used to denote the growing up of children: "Then they had grown. Edging into life from the back door. Becoming" (Morrison 138). This implicates that the child is not seen as a human being with their own identity, but only as a potential for the future. Something that is yet to be, and not a valid member of the society.

It is also interesting to note a stereotype which developed in the American society and was often used for justifying slavery and later as an excuse for treating African Americans as inferior and explaining the benefits of segregation. It was a stereotype about African Americans being perpetual children. As Joseph E. Illick states, this phenomenon stems from the times of slavery - "slaves were kept ignorant of the outside world and the written word, denied privacy, forbidden to recall their African past, and refused the very privileges that defined their white counterparts as adults" (46). This argument, that African Americans were in fact like children, served as a defense for their treatment because they were seen as unfit to live on their own and make responsible decisions and, therefore, needed white guidance. Illick continues to give examples where even antislavery thinkers such as a Unitarian pastor from New York used this same argument by stating that African Americans are childlike, docile and, affectionate and that it is antichristian to oppress such people (47). The African American race was in both cases seen as a child race while the strong white race represented their guardians. This shows how prejudice about one group in the society – children, who are seen as inadequate, a work in progress, weak, and unable, is transferred onto another group – African Americans. To go even further, Illick (48) notes that this prejudice is almost always related to males and that most written accounts about this subject use the male pronoun. The reason for this might be that typically men are seen as representatives of a race and at the time only men were even subjects of discussion about civil rights, the right to vote for example, because women regardless of class and race could not vote. Further on, upon studying the way African American women were portrayed in literature and movies, Illick notices that they are portrayed as either those who raise boys or those who seduce men – "the madonna and the whore" (48). This was once again a product of white supremacists in their attempt to defend sexual abuse that female slaves experienced from the hand of the slave-owners (Illick 48). Both of these representations are again related to men and focused on the women's role in a man's life and do now present women as independent, worthy human beings. Morrison also describes the life of an African American woman:

> Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this." White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were *black children* and each other… When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim (Morrison 138).

Morrison here gives a representation of a society according to the power that each group holds. First come white men, under them are the white women and then come the white children, the black men and under them, and then black women, and finally, at the very bottom are the black children.

Here we can see how all three levels of marginalization are related and how prejudice and inequality in the society generate even more inequality. The characters from *The Bluest Eye* are not only African Americans in a society dominated by whites, and not only female in the world ran by men, but also children in the adult world. They are victims of three different levels of marginalization and three different sets of stereotypes and prejudice. Tony Morrison confirmed this in the "Foreword" of *The Bluest Eye* where she stated that in order to present the consequences of marginalization and discrimination she chose a character that is "least likely to withstand such damaging forces because of their youth, gender and race" (10) and the most vulnerable member of a society – African American female child. Children in the novel are not simply marginalized, but almost completely excluded from the society. They have no rights and no power, they are excluded from decision making on all levels. They cannot create and change their society on a political and often not even on a personal level. Still, every decision from others affects their lives and they suffer the consequences of every political and societal change made in their surroundings. This separation from important events allows the author to pay more attention to the inner world of the characters and their micro-cosmos. In most of the works created by Toni Morrison there is little mention of significant historical figures or events, dates and facts – rather, the emphasis is on the character's everyday lives, immediate surroundings, and relationships. This gives her the chance to present the consequences of marginalization, prejudice, and inequality of any kind on family lives, character building, raising of children, and psychological states of characters. This, more intimate and personal, approach can leave a stronger impact on the reader and make them reevaluate their opinions and, finally, perhaps create a more inclusive, better society. Nancy J. Peterson supports this view in *Against Amnesia - Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory*. Peterson notes that some critics have even called Morrison's approach "unhistorical" and criticized her for ignoring the real, public history of time. Morrison, on the other hand, claims that she decided to focus on inner, personal lives of her characters because she believed that her stories otherwise would not be profoundly meaningful to her readers. Morrison believed that history is not what "great men have done" and was rather inspired by personal histories of ordinary black people living a

"livable" life. Peterson also notes that "individual stories are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable; by emphasizing individual stories, Morrison's novel creates necessary space for resistance, agency, and counter narratives" (76).

Still, it is important to note that in reality children and youngsters have had an important role in various historical events. One of them was the desegregation of the American society through a series of actions and civil disobedience such as African American pupils entering white schools (Illick 49). In doing so, children proved that they can in fact have a strong influence on the society and the adult world and that the power for change can also be in their hands. It is important to note this in order to avoid the paradox of enforcing stereotypes while trying to disprove them.

3. Marginalization on a Micro-Level

As described in the previous chapter, choosing to provide a child's perspective in stories related to difficult societal issues allows the readers an access to character's micro-cosmos. This means that the story is focused on the inner, psychological lives of characters in relation to the society, their everyday life, and closest relationships in their surroundings. Choosing an adult character would require from an author to dedicate more attention to political and historical aspects of the story and leave less space for an intimate approach into one's immediate life. This chapter will therefore examine the effects of marginalization on different aspects of a child's life. One of those aspects is the family dynamics, and especially family relationships, roles, upbringing of children, parental styles, and possible abuse in the family. Another one are the life conditions, such as housing, financial situation, education and opportunities. Child's emotional and psychological state in relation to marginalization is also another important aspect. All of the mentioned aspects prove that a child's perceptive offers a closer insight into the devastating consequences of marginalization in the society.

3.1. Socio-Economic Status

The first aspect of life affected by the marginalization and presented through a child's point of view are the living conditions of an African American family and especially issues such as financial status or housing. As described in the previous chapter, such a family would typically be in a worse socio-economic position than their white counterpart and face a number of difficulties. In the novel, both Claudia and Frieda's and Pecola's families face such issues. Chapters of the novel narrated by a third person omniscient narrator provide a more objective insight into Pecola family's, the Breedloves', living conditions – their home is described as a small rented storefront with gray peeling walls and ageing, half-broken furniture. The reader can, after reading this description, conclude that this family lives in poverty, but what does this poverty really feel like? In the chapters narrated by Claudia, the description of the signs of poverty does not focus on house walls or furniture, they are rather etched in her father's face during the long winter months, while he worries about keeping his family from the cold: "My daddy's face is a study. Winter moves into it and presides there. His eyes become a cliff of snow threatening to avalanche; his eyebrows bend like black limbs of leafless trees … Wolf killer turned hawk fighter, he worked night and day to keep one from the door and the other from under the windowsills" (82). The reader gets to learn about

Claudia's cold feet and lumpy, slippery oatmeal she had to eat each morning – something most have felt and tasted and can identify with.

Further on, the poverty is depicted in the form of a delicious blueberry ice cream that Claudia's rich classmate, Maureen, eats while Claudia and her sister watch with watery mouths and the feeling of shame that they feel because, for a moment there, they thought that Maureen is going to buy one for them: "It was extremely important that the world not know that I fully expected Maureen to buy us some ice cream, that for the past 120 seconds I had been selecting the flavor, that I had begun to like Maureen, and that neither of us had a penny" (69). Pecola can, on the other hand, hear poverty in the sounds of her parent's lovemaking since their home is so small that they all sleep side by side. According to Sweeny Prince, Morrison stresses the poverty of the Breedlove family and the effect that poverty has on their family life by deconstructing their home. They do not live in a typical house, but in an old, shabby storefront. The storefront does not have rooms typically expected in a family home and the whole area is one unit. Pecola and her brother do not have a room of their own and all of the family's living is done in the same space – "Drinking, having sex, fighting, sleeping" (Sweeny Prince 83). Pecola and her brother are therefore forced to bear witness to their parent's arguments and violence with no place to hide, so necessary at their sensitive age. Poverty and property issues were also depicted in the fear that the word "outdoors" caused for the girls – "Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life. The threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days" (17). As provided here, children do not experience the family's financial status through objective factors such as money or property; they experience it through their subjective perceptions. It is expressed in the things that they see, taste, hear, and their emotions and fears. This creates vivid pictures for readers and allows them to create a more authentic idea of what those living conditions actually feel like.

3.2. Family Life

Further on, one of the most important aspects of a child's everyday life is its family life and the child-parent relationship. In *The Bluest Eye,* Morrison depicts a family life that requires readers to read between the lines and become involved in the story with their own interpretation. First of all, there are two, quite opposite at first but actually related, examples of family lives in the novel. The first is Claudia's family that consists of a mother, father, Claudia, and her sister. The central position in the family and the household, at least from

Claudia's perspective, is held by their mother since she is the one Claudia mostly mentions in her narration. The mother is a strong woman who keeps the family together, runs the household, and puts most effort into the upbringing of children. Yet, she is not described as a typical mother in mainstream media would be – a gentle and caring mother full of kind words and cuddles for her children. What she has for her children is some sort of a "tough love". Claudia describes it: "Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration" (10). Still, throughout the novel it becomes obvious that this sort of treatment is not due to negligence or lack of parental emotions for their children. It seems far more likely that parents practice this sort of a relationship because they are scared for their children's well-being in a society that judges and rejects them. Because of their life conditions and experiences of belonging to a group that is subject to discrimination, they cannot allow emotions to run their lives and need to put practicality first, and this also extends to children upbringing. This rough approach is actually an act of love since its purpose is to prepare children for the reality. One sentence puts this idea into words – "Her hands are large and rough, and when she rubs the Vicks salve on my chest, I am rigid with pain" (11). Claudia here describes the time when she got very sick and her mother was taking care of her. The mother's hands are rough because of her hard life, and her treatment of children may cause them pain, but she does it because she believes that it will help them in the future. Her love is expressed through her acts - working hard in order to put food on the table, enable children to go to school, and put clothes on their back, cooking, keeping a household, and taking care of them when they are ill.

Another seemingly similar but in its core essentially different example of a parenting style is given in the relationship between Geraldine and Louis Junior. Geraldine is described as a mother who fulfilled all of her son's physical needs – "He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod" but she, once again, was not prone to expressions of affection - "Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts" (87). This might appear similar to the previous pattern of parental behavior, but the motivation behind Geraldine's acts is different, and therefore it bears different consequences. Morrison describes Geraldine as a type of a women who was, through her family life and later education, taught "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 human emotions" (83). This "funkiness" can also be seen and

translated as individuality. Morrison here talks about a whole generation of girls being told by the society that their primarily goal in life was to obey and please. Their purpose was to make perfect homemakers, always look pleasant to the eye, be calm and patient, always behave, and never stand out. Any free display of their character and nature would be seen as a misdemeanor. What men saw in them was security and comfort – ironed shirts in the closet, warm dinner on the table, a tidy house, children taken care of. These women, perhaps because they desperately wanted to fit into a society that found them "second" and "other" in both gender and race, accepted and internalized their roles. They taught their children "the difference between colored people and niggers … Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (87). Geraldine cuts her son's hair short and etches an artificial parting in his hair, she puts lotion on his skin in order to prevent skin from becoming ashen - doing her best to conceal all the "shameful" African American traits. When she walks, she is careful that her behind does not sway behind her and never wears too much lipstick so that her lips do not appear too plump – concealing her, again "shameful", female traits. Still, the numbing of her character and individuality resulted in the lack of passion and inability to develop emotional relationships with her close ones, even her own child. In turn, her son grows into an unhappy and frustrated boy. He wishes to fulfill his childhood needs – laugh, scream, play and roll in the dirt, use the forbidden and yet so attractive vocabulary of other children his age. However, this comes into conflict with what he is taught at home and his frustration and resentment towards his mother develops into anger and, finally, violence towards the weaker ones as it is depicted in an episode where he attacks Pecola and kills his cat.

Previous two examples of family life and child upbringing exemplify how the marginalization in the society affected the child-parent relationship and urged parents into developing different parenting styles. Pecola's family, on the other hand, offers an example of parental indifference and almost ignorance towards one's child. Pecola's family consists of her father, mother, and brother. Both parents are so concerned with their own issues – her father carries childhood traumas, and her mother is entrenched in her martyr role, that they almost completely disregard their parental obligations, and Pecola and her brother are mostly left to fend for themselves. Cholly, Pecola's father, is also the most negative character of the novel. He is an alcoholic who is violent towards his wife and sexually abuses his daughter. Yet, Morrison succeeds in avoiding black and white polarization and reveals the life circumstances which shaped him into a "monster" that he became. When he was still young,

Cholly was surprised by two white men while he was making love to a girl in the woods – "The men had shone a flashlight right on his behind. He had stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The beam of the flashlight did not move. "Go on," they said. "Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good." The flashlight did not move. For some reason Cholly had not hated the white men; he hated, despised, the girl" (42). This left a severe mark on his psyche making him change his attitude towards women and sexuality in general with horrendous consequences in the end. Cholly's shame turns into anger towards the world and himself. He cannot punish the real perpetrators because of his position in the society and he therefore punishes himself by auto destructive behavior and his family with his abuse. His acts are not motivated by meanness but his harsh life experiences. On the other hand, Pecola's mother is disappointed in her own life, poverty, and the relationship that she has with her husband so she distances herself from her family and finds fulfillment in working as a servant for a rich white family. She is a woman that since her childhood dreamed of a secure "Presence", as she puts it, which would guide her through life and keep her safe. At first she found this in Cholly, but as time went on their relationship went sour, and she continued to seek comfort in religion. This was another safe harbor for her – she let God take over the wheel. Her job is also doing the same for her. Hiding in the big beautiful house of her employers, feeling safe in their pantry full of supplies, and taking care of their cute daughter allowed her to distance herself from her own problems and the harsh reality of her life. In doing so, Pauline neglected her own house and children, and one of the rare things she was determined to teach them was respectability, but only towards others, "and in so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, 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" (128).

Three different parenting styles and family situations bring forth four different children. Claudia and her sister Frieda, whose upbringing was strict but fair and who had their parent's care and attention but also discipline, are brave girls who are ready to confront a group of bullies in order to protect their friend. They stand up to the society's standards which they deem wrong, and actively solve their problems. For example, when they were worried that Frieda is "ruined" because a man touched her or when Pecola experienced her first menstruation they immediately organized themselves and looked for a solution. They can recognize that something is wrong with the world around them and not look for the fault in themselves. Louis Junior, Geraldine's son, has all of his physical needs taken care of but he

senses that his mother has no real emotions for him, which turns him into an insecure and frustrated child that vents his frustration in the form of violence towards others. Pecola is neglected by her parents and abused by her father. Both physical and emotional needs of hers are unfulfilled and she lacks any positive examples from her family. This makes her especially vulnerable to the outside world and all of its prejudice and strips her off any feeling of self-worth and self-respect. This, in a combination with abuse within and outside her family, leads her into developing an unhealthy fixation on her physical appearance and slowly drives her into madness. These examples show how marginalization of a certain group in a society may influence individual families in different ways and strongly affect closest human relationships. All three families mentioned have been affected by the fact that they represent a minority in the society. It made some of them stronger and tougher, it alienated some of them, and for some of them it meant complete disintegration.

Sweeny Prince also notes that the notion of home has been especially important for African Americans and that the search for home, physical or metaphysical, was therefore often a subject of African American literature, music, or art in general (66). Home, which also signifies family life, is seen as a refugee from the social problems and a safe haven from the discrimination that minorities face in the society (Sweeny Prince 66). For Morrison, the home is represented by kitchens – areas that gather, feed and warm families, and she provides multiple descriptions of family's kitchens, and even the sexual abuse of Pecola by her father happens in the kitchen (Sweeny Prince 67). By providing descriptions of the kitchens, the hearts of the houses and the hearts of family lives, Morrison once again shows her preoccupation with ordinary lives of ordinary people.

3.3. Society Standards - Media and Education

Another aspect of marginalization that can be examined through child's perspective is the effect of the media and imposed social standards that they enforce on a child. In this novel, it is mostly displayed through white culture predominance, especially dominant beauty standards and the effect they have on characters. One of the first instances of this are Claudia's ruminations on the presents she gets from her parents – dolls, tea party sets, and dresses. Claudia is annoyed by the society's obsession with dolls and does not understand why everyone is so enchanted by them – "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll

was what every girl child treasured" (19-20). She cannot relate to them or pretend to be their mother because she can, with a child's simplicity and honesty, see that they are completely different from her. Their hair, skin, and eyes are the complete opposite from hers, and she would like to know what it is about them that fascinates the adults so much. This curiosity easily turned into anger, which made her rip the dolls apart, but it also transcended onto real-life white little girls. Claudia is baffled by the emotions they inspire, even in African American adults. It causes a kind of spite and frustration in her, but she cannot put it into right words or explain why exactly it makes her feel that way. As a child, she lacks the vocabulary or education necessary for it, so she is led by her common sense and instinct – something that adults often lack because they are used to thinking and acting in a certain way because of the dominant society and the media. Claudia's reasoning is rather simple – how can she hold as an idol something or someone that is so different from her. She will never be able to look like one of her dolls or white actresses that she sees in the movies. Those beauty standards were created by and for the dominant white part of the society and by ripping her dolls apart Claudia also tears down those impossible standards pushed upon her. It is the same with other gifts, "…tin plates and cups designed for tea parties that bored me… new dresses that required a hateful bath in a galvanized zinc tub before wearing" (22). Those gifts paint the image of what a girl is set out to be in a society – a beauty, a mother, and a homemaker. Still, for African American women this is often impossible. Firstly, they can never fulfill the beauty standards because the society's beauty idols are first and foremost Caucasian. Secondly, they are, due to their economic status, usually not the ones who enjoy fancy tea parties but the ones who prepare them for their rich white employers. They cannot afford nice dresses, but often end up wearing a maid's uniform or working clothes. Their homes can never look like the ones in the magazines because they are mostly rented, old, and poorly furnished. They are raised to admire and dream of certain things but never to have them because they are meant for another class and race in the society. Claudia is a smart and brave girl that recognizes the faultiness in this unsustainable value system that breeds dissatisfaction and a sense of worthlessness. Her child perspective is what allows the reader to see how ridiculous and wrong this system is in a most open, honest and simple way - through her emotions. The whole novel gives multiple examples of the malignant effects of this distorted value system. Each character is affected by their marginalized position in a society but each has their own story and different life circumstances that lead them to deal differently with this issue. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, cannot seem to adjust to the city life – she is accustomed to simple life in the countryside surrounded by other African Americans and feels utterly lonely.

In order to be accepted, she tries to change her accent and buy fashionable clothes but with the money they earn this is impossible. She looks for comfort in movies that, according to Morrison, teach her about two things – the idea of romantic love and the idea of physical beauty: "Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap" (122). She is unhappy because her husband, Cholly, is far from the ideal man she sees on the screen and she does not score very high on "the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (122). How such ideas take root can be compared to Morrison's description of Pauline's rotting front tooth, which triggered her complete disinterest in her own life and was the last nail in the coffin of her confidence. Morrison describes how it all started with a small speck, barely visible at first, but the insides of the tooth were infected and the disease slowly but surely advanced. The nerves were not affected so Pauline could not feel a thing, but eventually it reached the root of the tooth and by the time Pauline noticed it was too late to act.

The same is with the stereotypes that a certain society holds; they are pushed upon children since an early age with the toys they play with, images in magazines and stories from the children's books. Small things at first but as they grow up the idea gets stronger, and when the real consequences arise it is often too late. Morrison indicates this through referencing children storybooks popular in the twentieth century in the USA and the influence they had on Pecola's story. The novel starts with a line of sentences: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy", from *The World of Dick and Jane*, a reading primer for children. Jane and Dick books feature a white middle class American family living the American dream. According to Ward, the family consisted of a father, who provided for his family with his white collar job, a stay-at-home mother, and three children – Dick, Jane, and baby Sally. Ward describes how Dick was a boy who spent his days playing and pretending to be father while Jane is a young lady set out to become a perfect mother and wife, always calm and never going into extremes in her behavior or emotions (21). The books offered a narrow and romanticized view of family life, but they had a vast influence on the American culture since millions of children were taught to read through them (qtd. in Ward 19). The problem and their eventual downfall was the lack of diversity regarding class or race, which made it hard for children belonging to minority groups to identify with them (Ward

19). Morrison provides quite different, but more realistic examples of families in her novel and points at the cracks in this picture-perfect image of American family life by turning the sentences into a repetitive, head-spinning jumble of words: "…doyouwanttoplaydoyouwanttoplaywithjaneseethedogrunrundogrunlooklookherecomesafriendthefriendwillplay…" (4).Other children's texts referenced in the novel are *Alice and Jerry* storybooks. Morrison introduces this reference when giving readers an insight into Pecola's chaotic and obsessive line of thought mixed with her prayer to God for blue eyes: "Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes" (46). Pecola, hurt by the discrimination from both the white and the black community, and the abuse and disinterest that she faces in her family, looks up to her storybook heroes due to lack of any realistic and relatable figures in the media. She starts to believe that looking physically more like those storybook characters will make her life become more like theirs. The message she receives is clear: in order to be happy and loved – one must be white. Powell claims that referencing books used as a learning tool for reading, one of the basic skills that all children learn at the very beginning of their education, Morrison points a finger at "institutionalized ethnocentrism of the white logos, of how white values and standards are woven into the very texture of the fabric of American life" (749).

Through different forms of media, such as movies or books, educative materials, and advertisement the characters are introduced with unrealistic standards and measurements. Due to their race, class, or gender they are in most cases unable to meet the said requirements, which generates a feeling of inadequacy and frustration.

3.4. Psychological Effect– Internalized Racism

The previous chapter gives an idea of how one of the most devastating consequences pictured in the novel develop – internalization of the prejudice of the dominant society. It is a "set of learned attitudes and behaviors that marginalized people in a society acquire from both systems of discrimination and social interactions with authorities, family members, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances (qtd. in Fhagen 47). In line with the definition, Morrison covers both public and private areas of life. Systems of discrimination in this case refer to the racism and sexism that is present in the media, discourse, education system, and lack of opportunities that Morrison's African American characters meet in the society. Social interactions are present in the family relations of characters, their communication, and upbringing. By using a

child's perspective, the author was able to focus on individuals and their psychological states, but also offer an unbiased outlook since children do not have the formal knowledge about the systems of discrimination or years of experience in social interactions. Child's perspective is also important here because all the characters either developed this unhealthy self-image during childhood or are heavily affected by their childhood and coming of age experience. Morrison was especially interested in this phenomenon and states in the "Foreword" of *The Bluest Eye*: "The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has "legs," so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws, and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed" (X). The novel features a number of examples of internalized racism and stereotypes that affected lives of characters in different ways.

Internalized racism is visible in the paradoxical scene of a group of African American boys bullying Pecola because of her race and skin color even though they look exactly like her: "It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds" (Morrison 65). This type of violence is pointed, at the same time, towards the victim but also towards oneself. The boys cannot clearly identify what they feel and therefore they express their internalized racism in such a blunt manner. Adults, on the other hand, do it a bit differently. There is an example of Soaphead Church, a West Indian, whose whole family based their identity on a single white ancestor. This "white strain" in their bloodline caused a feeling of superiority in them and they were, from generation to generation, eager to "to separate (herself) in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa" (167). They completely stripped themselves off their tradition, inheritance, and culture and in return got "emerged repeatedly in the powerless government offices available to the native population" (168). In an attempt to preserve their "whiteness" some of the relatives married each other, causing potential physical and psychological problems for future generations. They stomped their identity and in return got crumbs from the white society: education that they cannot use to a full potential and "important" positions that hold no actual power. Their acts in the end equate with the boys throwing racial insults at Pecola because they are just as foolish.

Another example of cultural assimilation and discarding one's identity is in the character of Geraldine. Morrison describes her and women alike: 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; … their purpose is to please and obey – their family, husband, master, society" (83). As already mentioned in the section about family life, Geraldine does not want to be who she is and was not taught to love and respect herself as a woman and as an African American. For this reason, she makes herself believe that she is better than the rest of her race and makes a sharp division between colored people and "Niggers". She uses this derogatory term and mimics the white population in both physical appearance and behavior. Again, her ways of thinking can be compared to those boys' – utterly foolish. Why for the white society she is still African American, and they hold prejudice against her no matter what she does and how she looks. Her sterile demeanor and lack of identity make men see her as a household item and make her unable to make true human connections. Her whole family is affected by her unsuccessful assimilation and attempts to fit into the society's model of a perfect woman, mother and wife.

Another example of internalized racism and its consequences is Cholly Breedlove. The effect of the predominately white society is seen in Cholly's childhood thoughts about God: "God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that (black)" (134). This depicts the influence of a predominant culture on minority groups – the thought that God, the alleged creator of all of the Earth and people, Cholly included, is a white male while the devil, the source of all the evil in the world, must be black, looking a lot like Cholly himself. This makes Cholly feel unable to relate to this pale skinned, white bearded, blue eyed God, the same way Claudia feels about her dolls. He can recognize that this society is foreign to him and that he does not belong but since disappointed and hurt too many times in his life, he is not strong enough to see that the fault is not in him but in that very society. He accepts that he is unworthy and somehow less to the world around him and therefore gives up on the values and rules of that same world. The society did not want him and it freed him from their system of morality. He also had nothing else left to lose after being abandoned by his parents and insulted and abused many times over, so his freedom becomes dangerous, "Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep" (159). This feeling of freedom in the end allows him to commit deeds most offensive and controversial for the society around him, such as setting his house on fire and sexually abusing his daughter. The same citation about God and devil is also interesting because of the "white – good, black – evil" analogy. According to Powell, this way

of perception dates all the way to Plato's metaphor about soul as a white horse that is a follower of a true glory, and a black horse that leads the soul to do terrible and unlawful deeds (747). This ancient analogy depicts the white ethnocentrism deeply rooted in culture and language, and it is something Morrison is warning about. "In the time of slavery the black logos (the reasoning, the logic, the Word of black American culture) necessarily had to remain hidden in the semantic shadows of the Master's language. Sadly, for a long time after the Emancipation Proclamation, the black self was still confined to the shadows, the black logos to nuance" (Powell 748). Morrison's characters are children that are in a process of growing up and changing their identity. However, they can only express their identity in relation to the values, standards, language, and ideas of the white society.

Through the example of Cholly, Morrison also goes a bit deeper into explaining the mechanics of internalized prejudice and how it develops in a young person. As previously mentioned, Cholly was at the age of thirteen caught by two armed adult white men in the midst of his first sexual act. The men shone lights from the flashlights at their naked bodies and ordered them to continue having intercourse while threatening them with shotguns. This leaves Cholly with a feeling of humiliation and anger but as a young African American boy there was nothing he could do. He could not point his anger towards those men, "They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess—that hating them would have consumed him" (150-151). He could not take revenge or openly state his anger towards his, by all standards, more powerful abusers, so he rather pointed his hatred towards the girl, who witnessed this scene, and his own impotence: "For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight" (151). He expressed his anger and frustration towards the weaker ones, who are also victims of that same system, because that was the only thing he could do. Later on, in his adult life, he punished his wife and children for those sins of white men with his abuse and also himself with his auto destructive addiction to alcohol. Parenthood, once again, made him feel impotent and inadequate – he did not know what in this world he could give his children, teach them, or do for them. His children's love was a burden for him because he could not understand how they could love him. In order to accept their love, he first had to respect himself, and he could never do that because of his traumatic childhood and youth. This was paired with a lack of positive examples of parenting from his own childhood since he was abandoned and left to die by his mother as a baby and

turned away by his father, which, in the end, alienated him from his own family. Just like the girl from his youth, now his family bore witness to his failure, and he pointed his anger towards them. Once again, this can be related to the example of African American boys picking on Pecola and calling her a "Nigger". In a world where they hold no power and where they cannot stand up to the white society, they direct their frustration with their own position at the weaker one, Pecola, but also themselves at the same time. Morrison uses this simple example of children's behavior in order to explain more complex adult behavior patterns and psychological processes.

In the end, Morrison transfers this phenomenon to an even higher level - something that a whole community resorts to. According to Sweeny Prince, Pecola represents all of the negative traits that many of those in her community also possess to a certain degree - "black, ugly, poor" (76). Still, instead of identifying with her, they use her as a "scapegoat" (76) in order to free themselves from those traits. "We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares" (Morrison 205).They stick those labels onto her back and in return feel better about themselves since in comparison to her they are less poor, less ugly and finally, less black. This, once again, shows how internalized discrimination is both destructive and auto-destructive – it affects the individual, those around him, and the whole community.

Finally, there is Pecola, the novel's most tragic character. Pecola is an eleven-year-old girl living in a troubled family. What stands out as her most prominent characteristic is her "ugliness", which stemmed from her conviction more than her real physical appearance. Morrison states that no one could actually determine a facial feature that made the Breedloves ugly, but they simply believed it and each of them put on "a cloak of ugliness" (39). The reason they readily accepted this label is because it screamed at them "from every billboard, every movie, every glance" (39). They could not fulfill the standards made according to the white society. They were the very opposite of the American dream. Their "pretty green-and-white house" from the Alice and Jerry storybook was a shabby storefront, the "strong and smiling father" was an abusive alcoholic, the "very nice mother" is a woman who has given up on her own life. Morrison here calls this white society with its standards "the master", "The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement" (39). But in reality, the Breedloves are not ugly; they are

simply watched through the lens of a different culture. Their features are measured by a wrong scale, but they have been beaten down too many times so they do not object. Morrison here warns about a minority having "to define itself in terms of the ethnocentrism of white culture" (Powell 750). They are like the dandelions Pecola sees on the side of the road, beautiful and useful, but the society does not see their beauty and calls them weeds, "Maybe because they are so many, strong, and soon" (47).

In Pecola's mind, all of her problems would be solved if she was beautiful, and this beauty is for her embodied in one physical feature that people of her race can never possess – blue eyes. Those blue eyes are an ultimate representation of the internalized racism and Pecola's ultimate downfall. This constant feeling of inadequacy, sexual abuse from her father, and her terminated pregnancy eventually led her into the development of severe psychological issues. As Powell puts it, the white dolls, Shirley Temple and those blue eyes were the embodiments of the white logos (753) – something that Pecola had to compare herself with and fail each time. What Pecola obviously lacked, other than a healthy family environment, is a hero that would look more like her, a story with a character of her race, a movie with a star that had eyes, hair, and skin just like hers. Claudia could see the injustice in this system. It made her angry that little Shirley Temple danced with Mr. Bojangles, an African American actor, and she believed that she should be up on that movie screen with him, but Pecola blamed herself instead. For, according to Powell, at the center of Pecola's world, the center from which she was supposed to build her identity was the white culture (754). Pecola could only grow as "the other", different, less in the eyes looking at her from that center. If she did not, she would know that the problem was not in her eyes, but in the eyes of others that could not recognize her beauty.

In two instances Morrison stresses the fact that Pecola is emerged into the white culture and that she consumes it through scenes of her actually eating and drinking. The first happens when Claudia and Frieda's mother gets angry at Pecola for drinking too much milk during her stay at their home after Cholly burned down the Breedlove's house. Claudia explains that Pecola did not drink the milk out of greed, or even thirst, but because she enjoyed drinking from a cup with a picture of Shirley Temple. By using the cup, Pecola was connecting with her white idol and by drinking the milk out of it she was consuming Shirley, as if she believed she will become more like her by doing so. The choice of a drink here is also significant for its white color. Another scene is when Pecola eats candy with a picture of a white girl Mary Jane on the wrapper – "Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray,

blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort… To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane." (50).By eating the candy, Pecola consumes and internalizes a system of values and standards of the white society.

What is also interesting is the manifestation of the physiological problems that Pecola develops at the end of a novel. It appears that her personality splits into two different persons that are friends and foes at the same time. This can be related to the idea of African American double consciousness, according to which the black identity is constructed from a personal and a group identity (qtd. in Fhagen 48). It is also suggested that personal identity is developed during childhood and later affects the development of the group identity (qtd. in Fhagen 48-49). In Pecola's case, the personal identity seems to be neglected due to her problematic family situation, and this makes her especially vulnerable for uncritically accepting the group identity. Further on, different researches (Imarogbe 2004, Thompson 2006, Waren 2014) indicated that a stronger racial identity or "black consciousness" was related to a more positive attitude toward one's own racial physical features such as skin tone, hair, or lip size (Fhagen 50). Claudia, on the other hand, due to the support system of her family, had a stronger racial identity and could recognize her own, but also Pecola's beauty. She mentions how Pecola's smile gave her great joy and how she wanted Pecola to stand up straight and for once be confident (Morrison 73). Also, family influence can buffer the negative societal messages about blackness and therefore improve a young individual's perception of physical appearance (Phagen 52), which appears to have happened in Claudia's case. Although Claudia's parents also enforced some of the stereotypes and promoted certain values of the white supremacist culture, such as admiring pale-skinned dolls and the beauty of white little girls, they also respected and cherished their own, African American, culture. One of the elements that prove this is the love that Claudia's mother has for blues, a typically African American music genre. Claudia recognizes her mother's singing as a sign of good mood and learns to love the "Misery colored by the greens and blues" (26) in her mother's voice. Pecola could never experience such an affirmation of her culture in her home with an absent mother who pretended to belong to a white family and a father whose identity was also impaired by past humiliations and hard childhood experiences.

Morrison's characters are usually terrified of the "outside" since it represents the scary, discriminative world in which they are a minority, and opposed to it stands "inside" as representation of safety. What makes Pecola's case so tragic is that her "outside" and "inside" are equally scary, insecure and cold. This lack of safety and family support prevents her from

building confidence and a sense of racial identity, which, in the end, makes her consciousness "split" into two. It is a lesson that all of the children in the book learned the hard way, but Morrison set it out right at the beginning of the novel: "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941… For years I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that *the earth itself might have been unyielding*" (4-5). All along, it was never them that were flawed; they were only observed through the flawed eyes of the society.

Conclusion

Using a child's perspective enabled Morrison to present the readers with the micro-level of marginalization. It means that through a character that is discriminated on multiple levels - African American, female, child, the focus is moved from important historical figures and events to a more intimate, individual level. Marginalization is seen through the eyes of the most vulnerable members of the society – the ones that are most strongly affected by it. Also, the attention is not drawn to facts and objective parameters, but rather to the emotional and psychological aspect. This also provided the author with more "space" to explore intricate psychological phenomenon such as internalized racism.

Morrison alternated between a first-person child narrator and a third-person omniscient narrator. Using a child as a first-person narrator gives the feeling of intimacy and directness but demands more effort from the reader. It can also be limiting in expression and vocabulary. Third-person omniscient narrator is not limited by one person, time, or place and was used in order to prevent pity of the adult reader but rather motivate him to take responsibility.

The child's perspective offered an insight into intricate and complex effects that marginalization can have on everyday lives of "ordinary" people. Through the eyes of a child, the author was able to offer an emotional and vivid description of living conditions, family lives and psychological effects caused by the subordinated position of her characters.

The analyses of socio-economic status of African-American families in the novel showed that a child's perspective offers a subjective view of those factors. Children characters do not evaluate the family's living conditions and financial situations through income, expenses, and other objective factors but through their senses and feelings. They experience it through the coldness in their house, worried faces of their parents, tasteless meals, lack of space and intimacy, and other. This approach lowers complex socio-economic phenomenon to a sensory level and makes it easier for the reader to understand and relate to the experiences of the characters.

As far as family life and relationships are concerned, the child's perspective shows that marginalization affects every family but leaves a different imprint in each case. Some parents, due to hard living conditions that they face as members of a minority group, adopt a less affectionate, and a stricter parenting style. They express their love through their deeds rather than verbally of physically; they work hard for their children and want to make sure

that they grow into capable, independent, and strong young people who will be ready to face the discriminative society. Children raised in this type of a family are aware of their identity and more likely to recognize the faults in a racist and sexist system that surrounds them.

In some families, the desire to assimilate with the dominant society leads to complete rejection of one's identity. Characters are struggling to avoid prejudice and therefore strip themselves off any racial or gender features that might differentiate them from the average majority. This suppression of the authentic self makes it difficult for individuals to develop strong and meaningful emotional relationships with others. Children growing up in such an environment feel a constant demand to correct and censor their character and behavior. This creates a feeling of frustration and a lack of connection between family members.

Finally, in some cases marginalization completely disrupts the family life. The trauma that certain members of a marginalized group faced when *they* were still children deems them incapable of successfully performing their parenting role. The impotence that they feel, fueled by the fact that they cannot oppose the dominant society and protect themselves and their family makes them unable to connect to their own children. This shows how trauma is inherited through generations – one childhood ruined by marginalization creates another unhappy childhood and the circle continues.

Presenting the story through the eyes of a child also allowed the author to show the influence that dominant and exclusive society standards, enforced through education, media and advertisement, can have on most vulnerable population in the society. The novel features examples of educative materials, such as primary readers, which promote the idea of one ideal family type – white, well-off, with clear gender and parental roles. There are also examples of movies, which set the standards for physical beauty, again according to the white culture. A child that is a member of a minority group lives in a society tailored for and by the dominant group and is faced with the standards of beauty and success that they simply cannot fulfill. This idea is embodied in a little girl's fixation with blue eyes. For her they represent the holy grail of the white society and she believes they will secure her acceptance, affection, and a chance in life. Pecola is faced with a lack of role models that are similar to her and affirmation of her racial identity. She cannot develop a sense of respect for her culture due to the degree in which her family is wounded by the explicit and implicit discrimination that they experienced. Because of this, the child blames itself and this is how racism becomes internalized. The combination of internalized racism, broken home, and marginalization in the end leads Pecola into developing severe psychological issues. Her identity splits into two,

which might represent the dual consciousness of African Americans in the American society. Claudia, on the other hand, lives in a supportive family that respects and nurtures their own culture. Therefore, she has more self-esteem and is able to recognize and oppose the ethnocentricity of the white male culture that she lives in.

In conclusion, the child's perspective proved to be a valuable tool in exploration of marginalization. It provides the readers with a more authentic experience of phenomena such as racism, sexism, or ethnocentricity. It gives those expressions a real meaning because it presents the effect that they have on ordinary lives and psychological states of characters. Therefore, the message of the literary work becomes stronger and the literary work gains an educative value.

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