

Longing for Symbolic Capital in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Bourdieun Estimation

Md. Mozaffor Hossain

Department of English, Pundra University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh

alirumashuhana74@gmail.com

DOI: 10.35974/acuity.v7i2.2777

Abstract

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* portrays, among other both white and black lives in a less significant mark, the life of a young black girl named Pecola Breedlove whose desperate longing for owning the bluest eyes so as to free herself from the shame and disgrace of her birthed identity has inspired the author to name the novel so. Morrison inserted into the protagonist her (Morrison's) depraved experience of injustice, inequality, racial discrimination, social stigmatization and, above all, inborn physical outlook, wielded upon the black communities in America during her (Morrison's) time. While brooding over the question why a black girl would hanker after the bluest eyes, I find the hints, specified descriptions and clarified answers provided by Morrison in the novel logically matched with "Symbolic Capital", the last of the four capitals delineated by the French philosopher and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Accordingly, this article seeks to appraise Pecola's yearning for the bluest eyes in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* through Bourdieu's theory of "Symbolic Capital".

Key Words: Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital

INTRODUCTION

Why, in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, an eleven-year old black girl named Pecola Breedlove hankers after having her eyes as the bluest ones is what this study aims to unearth. While combing through the texture of the narrative for the relevant cause of the protagonist's longing for blue eyes, this study intends to call it an urge for not just literally the blue eyes as have been mentioned, rather for the symbolic capital as has been elaborated by the

Corresponding Author: Md. Mozaffor Hossain, Department of English, Pundra University of Science and Technology, Gokul, Bogura, 5800, Bangladesh. Email: alirumashuhana74@gmail.com

French philosopher and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Accordingly, this study ventures for presenting a critical interpretation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* in combination with Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic capital with a view to discerning the novel's narrative in terms of deeper social, cultural, economic, and mostly symbolic-capitalistic considerations.

METHODS

For performing the target critical analysis of Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye* in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, this study utilized qualitative content analysis method collecting secondary data from textual inspection, theoretical scrutiny, content analysis and the examination of available existing researches on both the selected text and philosophical theory. The study conducted in-depth perusals of the text of *The Bluest Eye* and Bourdieu's capital-related texts like "The Forms of Capital", "Social Space and Symbolic Power" and "Symbolic capital and social classes", which offered a convincing understanding of the research question. The study, with a view to reaching the intended premise, chose to apply the qualitative content analysis method, for it is a social scientific methodology which helps make sense of documented human communication, including textual documents, oral or written discourse and literary texts (Hsieh, 2005; Bengtsson, 2016; Baxter, 2020). In reality, content analysis engages the researchers or analyzers into dividing the texts into minor units: passages, sentences, clauses, phrases, or single lexis to unify and engender meaning from the data received and to make genuine inferences from it (Hsieh, 2005; Bengtsson, 2016; Baxter, 2020).

RESULTS

A deep-structured analysis which is also called a latent analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) of *The Bluest Eye*, available literary criticisms on it from myriad points of view, and the major contents relating to symbolic capital revealed that the craving for certain physical features presented in the novel can be more elaborately discerned in the light of the multifarious elements of symbolic capital instilled and prevalent both visibly and invisibly in the texture of the American society.

For instance, Hosseiny and Shabanirad (2015) had a Du Boisian reading of *The Bluest Eye* to come across the fact that the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, a black girl in the white American society is labeled as ‘The Other’ because of her not being like the community and not having the same color and beauty the white have. The members of the Breedlove family including Pecola are not both consciously and unconsciously happy with what and how they are. They long for the apparent complexion of the white since they are in a never-ending comparing and contrasting between themselves and the white Americans, where they always find themselves at the inferior end (Hosseiny & Shabanirad, 2015).

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* has clear indication as to how Pecola did manage her own ugliness in such a setting mentioned by Hosseiny and Shabanirad (2015) – “She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed – peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask” (Morrison, 1979, p. 29). As for Pecola, her genealogical possessions are the color of her skin, her parents’ skin, their physical features, the kind of hair they (black people) usually have, their language, their way of speaking and, above all, their *ugliness*. All of these hereditary features do not, of course, count for symbolic capital, in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, for they, in no way, signify any *power* or *prestige*. These lowly characteristics simply call for denial and disgrace in the eyes of those belonging to true symbolic power, i.e., fair skin, white Americanhood, blonde-ness, and the like.

So, Pecola necessarily needs to possess any property accepted as a symbolic power. With her experience, she figures it out that only having blue eyes will serve her the purpose in the most befitting manner. Accordingly, in her brain and mind, consciously and unconsciously, is the silent incantation for blue eyes. And, her constant invocation for pretty blue eyes gets amalgamated with her everyday deeds she performs and words she speaks.

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry runs, Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes. (Morrison, 1979, p. 34-35)

Praying for her eyes to be blue is what she ritually performs every now and then, especially at night; she multiplies her prayer without fail. “Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes.

Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time” (Morrison, 1979, p. 35).

Likewise, a detailed investigation into the available literature on Pierre Bourdieu’s symbolic capital and its careful comparison with that into *The Bluest Eye* as well as the critical works related to it helps to unearth that Pecola’s longing for blue eyes is basically a longing for symbolic capital. Lebaron (2014) regards symbolic capital as a sort of capital which is related to prestige and power, and, thereby, can be reproduced through the applications of genealogy, which people can perceive visibly or invisibly as a story of accomplishments, heritage or wealth, which help remember the past origin of a certain group, dynasty or individual. According to Bourdieu (1958, p.86; as cited in Lebaron, 2014), a title or name inherently gives vent to its power, and thus, claims the prestige it deserves. Therefore, the suggestion of *authority* which a family or tribal name, by default, offers is to be referred as “symbolic capital” which is understood as “power” in terms of prestige, honor and moral authority (Lebaron, 2014). Bourdieu (1958, p. 87; as cited in Lebaron, 2014) thinks that a charismatic link exists between the name and the named entity; to own the name means to own the attributes it carries innately.

DISCUSSION

Mama had told us two days earlier that a “case” was coming – a girl who had no place to go. The county had placed her in our house for a few days until they could decide what to do, or, more precisely, until the family was reunited. (Morrison, 1979, p. 11).

The girl mentioned as a “case” in the above-cited part from Toni Morrison’s the *The Bluest Eye* is Pecola Breedlove, an 11-year-old black girl and the protagonist of the novel while the narrator is Claudia MacTeer, one of the two young white girls of the family where Pecola is to be given a shelter to. Pecola has an ingrained penchant for white beauty. When she is offered with some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup, “She was a long time with the milk, and gazed at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face” and she was having the conversation with

Frieda MacTeer, the other white girl, about “how cute Shirley Temple was” (Morrison, 1979, p. 12- 13). Thus, the notion of worshipping whiteness is demonstrated in the psyche of both white and black minds almost from the starting point of the narrative.

Adults of the society spontaneously regard “blue-eyed Baby Doll” (Morrison, 1979, p. 13) as the fondest wish of the female children. But, Claudia, the narrator, desires to know what makes a blue-eyed Baby Doll a symbol of such an unwavering beauty. She says,

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. 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. (Morrison, 1979, p. 14)

As for Pecola, she never cares for what is there inside; she is fond of what is there outside that makes someone look beautiful. “....she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face” (Morrison, 1979, p. 16).

But, why does Pecola so desperately worship whiteness, blonde-ness, or fair-skinnedness? She has things in reverse, which compel her intuitively to like these and/or long for attaining these. Whatever she is by birth, whatever her parents symbolize racially, socially and economically, and whatever she belongs to, all profoundly coerce her to like what she likes and to want to be what she wants to be. Similarly, that Pecola’s family was living in an unlivable place was also due to the status they possessed and the capital they belonged to. Morrison clarifies,

They lived there because they were poor and black and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly or aggressively ugly. (Morrison, 1979, p. 28)

Morrison thinks Pecola as well as her family has an established conviction regarding the fact that each of them is ugly and they spontaneously surrender to anything people say as to their ugliness.

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (Morrison, 28)

By default, to the society and all, Black people were synonymous with ugliness. In fact, Black people were alternatively called “ugly people” (Morrison, 1979, p. 149). Evidently, *The Bluest Eye* focuses on the most susceptible member of the community – a minor girl – to illustrate the outcomes of dire social segregation and sheds light on manipulated destituteness that is, rather, imposed on people belonging to a certain criterion marked by ignoble economic status (Baines, 2020).

From everyday quarrels, naked fights and shameful scenes which her parents engaged themselves into, Pecola longed for disappearing, but only to her utter and persisting dismay. Morrison illustrates her helplessness,

“Please, God,” she whispered into the palm of her hand. “Please make me disappear.” 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. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (Morrison, 1979, p. 33)

Pecola’s prayer was never granted. She could never disappear. So, “She had long ago given up the idea of running away to see new pictures, new faces” (Morrison, 1979, p. 34).

She could deeply realize nothing would work to make her world less shameful.

As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. (Morrison, 1979, p. 34)

Even Pecola's teachers at school had always treated her with utmost discomfort and avoidance. "They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond" (Morrison, 1979, p. 34). To escape all sorts of humiliations awkwardness for how she was,

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (Morrison, 1979, p. 34)

It does not matter if she looks beautiful or otherwise to herself, rather she cares for other people's eyes, others' reactions, treatments towards her, for once she possesses blue eyes, people's eyes are going to shed welcoming lights unto her. "Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (Morrison, 1979, p. 35). Because she does not own, in her physique, any attractive feature recognized as such in the society, she is to go through humiliations and neglects wielded by anybody she comes across. Mr. Yacobowski, the white shopkeeper, does not directly look at her when she goes to his shop to buy Mary Jane candy. He suspends his eyes from Pecola as if she did not exist. She is habituated to receiving such distaste toward her. She understands,

The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (Morrison, 1979, p. 37)

Seeking a shelter in beauty represented by whiteness works, for Pecola, as a panacea for all sorts of humiliations she goes through. When she receives noticeable avoidance from the shopkeeper who, while taking the money for the candy from Pecola's hand, even "- hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand", she "- feels the inexplicable shame ebb" and at this, "Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame" (Morrison, 1979, p. 37).

What can Pecola do? Does she have the accepted sinew to send a worthy message to the man who has just lodged sheer neglect to her? No, she doesn't have anything to do but shed tears. Moment before tears overflow, she turns to the picture of Mary Janes on the wrapping paper of the candy she just bought.

A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (Morrison, 1979, p. 38)

Humiliations are hurled upon Pecola, for how she looks, not just by the white, but, more severely in some cases, by her own folks as well. Her own kind of people, black people, did enjoy inflicting suffering to her more than the white. Young black boys would hold her a victim, dance a weird dance around her and sing humiliations to her, "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnecked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps necked. Black e mo....." (Morrison, 1979, p. 50).

Things that Pecola does not have anything to do with, or does not have any control over are considered her faults, and accordingly or overtly, she is to be disgraced. The black boys "- had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no

control; the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence” (Morrison, 1979, p. 50). Morrison (1979, p. 50) gives an explanation of the dehumanizing bully the black boys themselves hurl upon a helpless and innocent black girl, “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 – cooled – and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. (Morrison, 1979, p. 50)

This desperateness of bodily owning something that is not there certainly has embedded social, cultural and economic explanations which we can elaborately understand through what Pierre Bourdieu explicates regarding capitals in his “The Forms of Capital” (1986), “Social Class and Symbolic Power” (1989) and “Symbolic Capital and Social Space” (2013). The idea of “symbolic capital” is the fourth common kind (“specie”) of capital in the line of cultural, economic, and social capital, which French sociologist and public intellectual, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) deals with in his “Forms of Capital” (Lebaron, 2014). In this regard, Bourdieu expounds,

The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects. Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its “incorporated,” embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. (Bourdieu, 1986)

Bourdieu (1986) goes on elucidating, “It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory.”

capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (Bourdieu, 1986)

To Bourdieu (1986), physical features and psychological disposition fall into “the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”, one of the divisions of *Cultural Capital*.

The idea of “symbolic capital” is the fourth form of capital advanced by Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory, in combination with cultural, economic, and social capital, albeit its being not on the same plane as the other species, for it emphasizes the “symbolic” dimensions of social life, which puts it in a dissimilar role. Nevertheless, Bourdieu elaborates its existence as an unaffected sort of capital with strong properties on life as a whole (Lebaron, 2014). As to symbolic capital, Ihlen (2018), while appraising Pierre Bourdieu, says, “Priceless things have their price.” Thus, symbolic capital stands for a status signifying social, cultural, economic and other holds of enviable attributes having roots in the other forms of capital that a social actor might belong to (ibid). To Bourdieu, the term, capital stands for both a medium of exchange and a store of value, which provides an individual with the power to exercise influence on people, or which is something akin to electric power, a source of energy (Wlaker, 2018). Bourdieu regards that human society consists of, among other things, a couple of dimensions, materialistic and symbolic (Ibid). Symbolic capital can be perceived by the general notion of symbolic structures (“subjective” vs. “objective,” discursive” vs. “material,” etc.) which are determined by their “comparative autonomy they essentially participate to create and delineate the “exchange rates” among other mainstream capitals.

Therefore, it can neither be considered as an independent truth (which could be simply amassed, relocated, etc.) nor as a lesser property, which would be entirely and manually authenticated by the other species, rather it can be felt as something or anything that, through

social and cultural conviction and practice, demands an exchange rate of value (Lebaron, 2014). It is, in Bourdieu's version, a multi-layered notion symbolizing reputation itself, and in fact, it is created on the basis of links to power and the extrinsic as well as intrinsic framework of society (Iahlen, 2018).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) classifies capital into three forms basing on the field in which it works, e. g. economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital can instantly and straightly be converted into money and may be formalized into property rights while cultural capital can conditionally be transformed into economic capital and is likely to be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications whereas social capital which consists of social connections can be circumstantially converted into economic capital and is likely to be recognized as a title of nobility. Bourdieu, in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, interprets "taste" having symbolic value in all sorts of connectedness it has when it demonstrates one's choice of dress, food, furniture etc. revealing stark distinction (Bourdieu thinks so) of power and social class disparity (Loesberg, 1993). In his *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu suggests that both linguistic and literary meanings of a language depend on as well as refer to power distinction and social difference (Loesberg, 1993).

In a similar consideration, a thorough and critical reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) places one to the understanding that the novel reinforces the discourse of the blue-eyed by re-asserting their cultural superiority (Farshid, 2014). She presents the saga of a black girl lacking in the society-defined ingredients of beauty, i.e., white skin, blue eyes and blonde hair, and for her not possessing the symbols of prettiness, she receives harsh feedback and subsequently succumbs to it (Farshid, 2014). That Pecola and her family do not fundamentally have what their white counterparts have makes them suffer both individually and socially, and help them construct an accepted justification about anything bad happening to them. According to Abusneineh (2018), *The Bluest Eye* focuses specifically on the lingering effects of internalized racism and black self-hatred. The novel portrays a community which replicates dominant cultural myths about beauty and value (Abusneineh, 2018). Pecola's mother, Pauline, feels isolated and disconnected for her community. Her failed and chaotic relationship with her

husband, Cholly, stabilizes her conviction that romantic love belongs to only those who are good-looking and as such valued in the community (Abusneineh, 2018). That being the case, as Pecola grows up, she yearns for blue eyes, a longing for whiteness which stands for beauty and worth. In fact, blue eyes symbolize universal beauty and to own them means owning whiteness (ibid). She gets devalued and bullied due to the kind of worthlessness she possesses, e.g., school boys laugh at her countenance, the grocer defies her as she attempts to purchase candy and Maureen, a fair-skinned girl who befriends her for some time, cut jokes at her expense (Abusneineh, 2018).

Pecola does not want to change her own perspective towards herself and the world, rather she wants to be seen and esteemed by the world through a different perspective which will be ensured if she possesses blue eyes that will let others see her anew, by means of a lens unobstructed by racism and white culture – characterized notion of attractiveness (Isherwood, 2006). On a similar note, Muhi & Ridha (2010) opine that in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison marks Western standards of beauty and explicates that the concept of beauty is socially fashioned. She presents a timeless problem of white racial dominance prevalent in the United States and addresses the impact it has on the life of black females growing up in the 1930's. Morrison started writing the novel in the mid of 1960s, she came across the idea about two decades ago when one of her classmates divulged a clandestine fact that she had been praying to God for two years to grant her blue eyes but not receiving her wish fulfilled. During that time, there was this movement with "Black is beautiful" slogan at the peak, which made Morrison think about why color mattered and how it needed broader public consent (Muhi & Ridha, 2010).

Pecola, in her incessant pursuit for obtaining the emblematic source of power, the blue eyes, does not just limit her endeavors into prayer to God only; rather she tries almost every possible means to have her longing granted. That being the case, she believes the so called self-declared "Spiritualist and Psychic Reader" (Morrison, 1979, p. 137), Soaphead whom she besought, "I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me."
"Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened."
"My yes"

“What about your eyes?”

“I want them blue.” (Morrison, 1979, p. 138)

To Soaphead, it sounded, “...an ugly little girl asking for beauty” (Morrison, 1979, p. 138). Morrison relates to the incident,

A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him – money, love, revenge – this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. (Morrison, 1979, p. 138)

Soaphead admitted to Pecola his utter powerlessness in making anything miraculous happen. Nevertheless, he wanted to give it a try if God would respond to the little girl’s longing for some beauty that might rescue her from the labyrinth of helplessness. He instructed the girl to make offerings through giving rotten food to a sleeping dog, which she complied to. Hardly could Pecola endure the odor of the dark and sticky meat which made her want to puke, and she held her stomach to resist nausea. As the dog dies from intaking the poisoned meat, Soaphead Church writes a letter to his God and in it, he mentions how much Pecola has been longing for her eyes to be blue, “Do you know what she came for? Blue eyes. New, blue eyes, she said. Like she was buying shoes. “I’d like a pair of new blue eyes.” She must have asked you for them for a very long time, and you hadn’t replied” (Morrison, 1979, p. 143).

Eventually, Pecola goes mad and believes she has “Really, truly, bluey nice” (Morrison, 1979, p. 153) eyes at which she continues looking through the mirror, and she doesn’t even blink them, she can look right at the sun with them. She finds people around her prejudiced because she has much bluer eyes than others. She boasts, “Just because I got blue eyes, bluer than theirs, they’re prejudiced” (Morrison, 1979, p. 155). She is obsessed with her presumed blue eyes and loves to keep looking at them. She cries, “Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again” (Morrison, 1979, p. 159) and she thinks, “They get prettier” (Morrison, 1979, p. 159) each

time she looks at them. She rejoices at the thought that none should have eyes as blue as hers, which is why, she frequently has this conversation with herself comparing hers with others' eyes. She wants to believe her eyes are "prettier than the sky", "prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes", "prettier than Joanna's" and "Bluer than Michelena's" (Morrison, 1979, p. 159). And, if by any possible chance somebody possesses eyes bluer than Pecola's, she would pray for "the bluest eyes". She says, "If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the world" (Morrison, 1979, p. 161).

Nevertheless, Pecola hankers for company, for play mate, for a friend. She believes, deep down, that it's only having the bluest eyes that could win her friends and companions. She cries to her companion, "Oh. Don't leave me." But she is determined to leave her, for she thinks Pecola is acting silly. Nevertheless, Pecola asks her, "Because my eyes aren't blue enough? Because I don't have the bluest eyes?" (Morrison, 1979, p. 161). She continues entreating her companion, "Don't go. Don't leave me. Will you come back if I get them? The bluest eyes. Will you come back then?" (Morrison, 1979, p. 161).

In the words of the narrator, one of the white sisters, Morrison depicts a gory picture of how one type of sheer physical feature, as a whole, glows and rejoices at the assumed weakness of another, and thus loudly declares to be a symbolic power.

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 think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (Morrison, 1979, p. 163)

So, this white – black contrast, this white supremacy – black inferiority had been well established having its olden social roots ensuring no easy withdrawal. "Mirror, Mirror, who is the most beautiful woman in the world?" Mirror answers, "The Whitesnow Princess is." In addition

to the Whitesnow Princess, Shirley Temple, Mary Jane, and even Barbie are the symbols of white prettiness engendered and upheld by the conventional aesthetic standardization (Jiang, 2007). Fair complexion, blue eyes, and golden hair are the signs of woman's physical attractiveness which noticeably shape supreme body prototypes, and insert the accepted aesthetic demarcation in one's psyche (Jiang, 2007). Beauty, i.e., whiteness, is what the conventional belief admits, whereas ugliness, marked by other physical features, such as darkened skin, is categorized as the hideous and despised difference (Jiang, 2007). Bourdieu (1986) labels this sort of possessions socially and culturally defined as better identities, as *cultural capital*. To him, "Cultural capital can exist in three forms, first of which is in the embodied state" (Bourdieu, 1986). He regards the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan as a capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu explains that although the embodied capital, i.e., the external wealth transformed into an inseparable part of the person, cannot be instantly converted into economic material, it helps to estimate the distinctive value of the person to others (Bourdieu, 1986).

Hamamra (2020), in one of the many other perspectives, assesses *The Bluest Eye* through eco-feminism and upholds the view that significant links lie between the way one deals with women, black people and those belonging to the lower-class, and how one behaves with animals and non-human elements of nature. Morrison metaphorically intimates and reveals, in the novel, the similarity between the torture rendered on animals and the oppression unleashed on women in a masculine society (ibid). Hamamra (2020) considers Pecola's dream of having blue eyes as interrelated with coils of racism, sexism and animal inhumanity. Hamamra (2020) also connects Pecola's predicament with ecological feminism which believes that one's treatment towards women, colored people and the underclass is identical to one's treatment to non-humans and natural environment. In a different consideration, McKittrick (2000) thinks that *The Bluest Eye* hints various experiences of geographic criteria and atmosphere that synchronously confound and restate the connotation of being black. Locations, physical features and psychological statures while intertwining, vacillate and seemingly remain identical, and clash with each other in some convoluted manners in the novel. McKittrick also (2000) draws on anti-racist theory and forms anti-racist and feminist topographies to inspect Morrison's novel and characters with a view to generate the connection among the correlated classes of race, racialism, sex and

habitation, illustrating how substantial actualities, bodily variances and individual discernment of geography, color and creed are reciprocally built. The narrative identifies what it means to be black in a white-dominated setting and what sorts of complicated individualities exist in countries, nations, societies and families, which negate harmonious and shared life experiences (McKittrick, 2000).

Even though *The Bluest Eye*, through myriad researches (McKittrick, 2000; Jiang, 2017; Abusneineh, 2018; Hamamra, 2020), receives so many interpretations, its characters' especially protagonist's pining for one or more of the features of the white people stands out. Whiteness is desired and valued, for it functions as an inexplicable agent for various beneficial results, analogous to how human capital has been regarded by economists when explicating revenue discrimination or resource inequality (Reiter, 2020). Reiter (2020) embeds whiteness into the literature on human capital, social capital and cultural capital to demonstrate how such an implicitly and explicitly established conceptualization that unfairly and overly benefits a certain section while wielding injustice on a certain other. Samaluk (2014), while empirically exploring the evidence of the complexity of ethnic privilege and disadvantage through experiences of migrant workers from post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) on the UK labor market, finds how whiteness molds racial privilege and hindrances at work. Using a Bourdieuan conceptual framework of symbolic capital, Samaluk (2014) also reads the historical and macro socio-economic outline of European Union expansion eastwards with a view to exploring whiteness and the intricacy of ethnic advantages at workplace, and comes across intricate racial dissection of the UK labour market, exposing various layers of whiteness that mark CEE workers' position and their agency and indicating interpersonal and transcontinental functions of whiteness and their impacts on varied workforce. As a matter of fact, whiteness works as a crucial capital in the creation of social standing because it qualifies those traditionally deserving to claim it, and designates a preeminent status in the prevailing social pyramids (Reiter 2009).

Exploiting the figure of the 'white theory boy' or 'dead white man' across empirical interpretations of theory, scholastic annotations of manliness, and didactic approaches, Burton (2015) posits that even the processes and practices of knowledge formation are continually

dominated by patriarchy and fairness of countenance. Burton (2015) brings an intersectional analysis of gender, class, 'race' and ethnicity to depict an imagery which uncovers a more critical and fine-grained account of the relationship among power, knowledge, and social status. In such a consideration, why doesn't Pecola receive what she desires? The obvious answer is, she yearns for obtaining blue eyes which signify the predominant white archetype of beauty which discounts anyone representing African-American features. As such, she is not supposed to acquire that lofty standard of beauty. Moreover, the feeling of deficiency is exacerbated by the beauty-based social frivolities defined by as well as practiced in the white Americans. Her own mother prefers serving white people to taking care of her own children, and peers constantly stigmatize her for ugliness, which entices her to be obsessed with the unattainable blue eyes (Kozłowska, 2018). Toni Morrison explicitly exposes how Western criterion of perfect beauty is formed and disseminated amongst the black people as she depicts how the darkened skin and its associated aspects impair the lives of the African-American people. Simultaneously, she elucidates how the idea of whitened beauty, if enforced directly or indirectly on the life of a black boy or girl, their sense of self-respect, self-love and self-dignity can be severely injured (Muhi & Ridha, 2010).

To signify the presence of symbolic capital in social life, Bourdieu (2013) elaborates that social agents perform as factually marked by a couple of distinct kinds of properties: firstly, by solid properties which, starting with the physique, can be numbered and measured like any other object of the material world; and, contrarily, by symbolic properties which are fastened with them through an association with subjects able to perceive and evaluate them and which claim to be evaluated in accordance with their specific affiliation to value. Bourdieu (1989) believes that things and values in the society act through some twofold ways, namely structuralism and constructivism which, he clarified, are different from the structuralism championed by Ferdinand-de-Saussure. Bourdieu explains,

By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic system (language, myths, etc.) objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining

their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes. (Bourdieu, 1989)

Symbolic capital is not placed on the same level as the other types, since it emphasizes the “symbolic” aspects of social life, which produces an uneven consideration (Lebaron, 2014). Lebaron (2014) considers that Bourdieu even argues on its presence as an original kind of capital. One of the definitions clarifies that symbolic capital is, precisely, identical to any other type of capital when it is about its “recognition” or its “perception” as per some specific “schemes” (Bourdieu, 1987; as cited in Lebaron, 2014).

Bourdieu elaborates,

....symbolic capital is nothing but economic or cultural capital as soon as they are known and recognized, when they are known according to the perception categories they impose, the symbolic strength relations tend to reproduce and reinforce the strength relations which constitute the structure of the social space.... (Bourdieu, 1987; as cited in Lebaron, 2014)

Bourdieu labels the underpinning of various social or cultural groups as the creation of a specific sort of buildup of capital, “a cumulative effect analogous to the one which gets capital to attract capital in another context This initial capital is apparently nothing but the name and the domination it confers to the group” (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 85; as cited in Lebaron, 2014). According to Lebaron (2014), this kind of capital relates to prestige and power, and is replicated through the uses of family, which can be regarded as a story of accomplishments signifying the ancestries of the group and, thus, creating symbolic value(s) on this foundation. “The name in itself constitutes a power. The names conserved by tradition are those of victorious fractions or the main families to whom diverse groups will ask for protection” (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 86; as cited in Lebaron, 2014). Therefore, “symbolic capital” is tacitly associated to titles of families

and affiliated to the specific power of clans and communities. It is next to the notion of “power,” when it is construed with regard to prestige, “honor,” and “moral authority” and not of straight solid or corporeal restraints. It is a sort of magic: “a magical link unites the name and named object; to borrow the name is to participate to the virtues of its owner and in particular, to the “Baraka”, vital force, mysterious and well-being power which favors elite men” (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 87; as cited in Lebaron, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The fact that humans, for themselves and for those they like or love, wish for things or possessions deemed as good and/or respectable in human society either in pre-historic time or now or in future is universally recognized, which is, of course, something usually experienced or a part of commonsense. Bourdieu (1986) calls symbolic capital anything other than directly financial, which acts as an emblem of power, respect or goodness in human society. Toni Morrison’s protagonist Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* pines for her eyes to be the bluest due to the established fact that blue eyes in whiteness-dominated society symbolize beauty, supremacy, power, respect and almost all expected features society values most. Therefore, human aspects constituting Bourdieu’s *symbolic capital* or *symbolic power* are real and logical, and consequently, longed for by the whole universe, except rare exceptions; so are blue eyes for black girls like Pecola Breedlove, Toni Morrison’s protagonist in *The Bluest Eye*.

REFERENCES

- Abusneineh, B. (2018). Blue Eyes as Black Youth Redness in *The Bluest Eye*. *Critical Ethnic Studies*.
- Baines, A. (2020). Toni Morrison and the culture of poverty. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 14 (2), pp. 110-116. DOI: 10.1080/15595692.2019.1689389
- Banu, M. N. (2015). Racialized Beauty: Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. *Shanlax International Journal of English*, 3 (4), pp. 5-9.
- Baxter, J. (2020). Content Analysis. In A. Kobayashi (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human*

- Geography (Second Edition)*, pp. 391-396. Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10805-4>.
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, 2, pp. 8-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Bilal Tawfiq Hamamra (2020): Deconstructing Wo(man) and Animal Binary in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2020.1806022>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In Richardson, J., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 241-258. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1989). Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1), pp. 14-25.
- Bourdieu, P. (2013). Symbolic capital and social classes. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 13(2), pp. 292–302. DOI: 10.1177/1468795X12468736
- Burton, S. (2015). The Monstrous 'White Theory Boy': Symbolic Capital, Pedagogy and the Politics of Knowledge. *Sociological Research Online*, 20 (3), pp. 167-177.
- Farshid, S. (2014). Panoptic Mechanism of the Blue-Eyed in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, 8.
- Hamamra, B. T. (2020). Deconstructing Wo(man) and Animal Binary in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Stories, Notes, Reviews*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2020.1806022>
- Hosseiny, S., Shabanirad, E. (2015). A Du Boisian Reading of *the Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. *Intercultural Letter of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 60, pp. 121-127.
- Hsieh, H.-F. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687
- Ihlen, Ø. (2018). Symbolic capital. In R. L. Heath & W. Johanesen (Eds.) *The international encyclopedia of strategic communication*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Isherwood, C. (2006). In a Time of Unbelonging, There Were No Marigolds. *The New York Times*. Published on November 7, 2006.
- Jiang, X. (2007). Transcending "the Bluest Eye": An Analysis of Toni Morrison's Body Beauty. *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 9 (1), pp. 107-112. DOI: 10.1080/25723618.2007.12015613
- Katherine McKittrick (2000) 'Black and' Cause I'm Black I'm Blue: Transverse racial

- geographies in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 7 (2), 125-142. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713668872>
- Kozłowska, A. (2018). Yearning for Beauty. The Expression of Melancholy in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye". *The Gdańsk Humanistic Journal*, 9.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26881/jk.2018.9.07>
- Lebaron F. (2014) Symbolic Capital. In: Michalos A.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2961
- Loesberg, J. (1993). Bourdieu and the Sociology of Aesthetics. *ELH*, 60 (4), pp. 1033-1056.
- Morrison, T. 1979. *The Bluest Eye*. Chatto & Windus. Great Britain
- Morrison, T. (1979). *The Bluest Eye*. Chatto & Windus.
- Muhi, M. T., Ridha, F. (2010). The Quest for an Ideal Beauty in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. *Journal of College of Education for Women*, 21 (2), pp. 550-564.
- Reiter, B. (2009). Whiteness as Capital: Constructing Inclusion and Defending Privilege. *Government and International Affairs Faculty Publications*, 26. Retrieved from: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gia_facpub/26
- Reiter, B. (2020). A theory of whiteness as symbolic racial capital: Bourdieu 2.0. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 6 (5), pp. 111-117. Retrieved from: <https://hdl.handle.net/2346/86609>
- Samaluk, B. (2014). Whiteness, ethnic privilege and migration: a Bourdieuan framework. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 29 (4), pp. 370 – 388.
- Walker, E. (2018). On Pierre Bourdieu Part 4: Symbolic Capital. Empty Wheel. Retrieved from: <https://emptywheel.net>