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Racism, Trauma and Empowerment in Selected Works of Afro-American fiction  
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# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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## Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se bude věnovat Afro-americké literatuře, konkrétně dílům *The Color Purple* Alice Walkerové a *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrisonové. V úvodu práce studentka nejprve s použitím relevantní sekundární literatury stručně nastíní literární a historický kontext a vysvětlí pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (rasa, rasismus, trauma, apod.).

Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolených děl, v níž se studentka zaměří především na způsoby a literární prostředky, jimiž jsou prezentovány otázky mezirasových vztahů, rasových stereotypů, násilí, traumatu apod. Ve svých analýzách bude odkazovat na primární díla a svá tvrzení bude opírat o kritické zdroje. Závěrem analýzy přehledně shrne a přístup k vybraným tématům u obou románů porovná.

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## **ANNOTATION**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to identify, depict, analyse and compare selected themes and issues found in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The first two chapters of the paper, with the support of secondary sources, provide definitions of selected terms and an introduction to the historical-cultural background, focusing on the life of African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. The three main chapters provide a detailed analysis of the identified themes and issues, such as racism, trauma, sexual abuse and narrative aspects, supported by primary literature and secondary sources and a final comparison of the said themes.

## **KEYWORDS**

Racism, sexual abuse, trauma, African Americans, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison

## **NÁZEV**

Rasismus, trauma a emancipace ve vybraných dílech afroamerické beletrie

## **ANOTACE**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je identifikovat, zobrazit, analyzovat a porovnat vybraná témata a problémy, které se vyskytují v knihách *Barva nachu* od Alice Walkerové a *Velmi modré oči* od Toni Morrisonové. V prvních dvou kapitolách práce jsou s podporou sekundárních zdrojů uvedeny definice vybraných pojmů a úvod do historicko-kulturního pozadí se zaměřením na život Afroameričanů v první polovině dvacátého století. Tři hlavní kapitoly poskytují podrobnou analýzu identifikovaných témat a problémů, jako jsou rasismus, trauma, sexuální zneužívání a narativní aspekty, s podporou primární literatury a sekundárních zdrojů a závěrečnou komparaci zmíněných témat.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Rasismus, sexuální zneužívání, trauma, Afroameričané, Alice Walkerová, Toni Morrisonová

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## Introduction

Such sensitive topics as racism, child abuse, sexual trauma and trauma itself are not easily analysed. This bachelor thesis, however, aims to delve into these problematic themes and simultaneously compare them in two selected novels, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The bachelor thesis is divided into five chapters – the first two chapters being theoretical and the following three practical. The first chapter of the theoretical part introduces some relevant terminology, such as “trauma” and “racism”. The understanding of these terms will be applied and commented on later in the thesis.

The second chapter briefly presents the cultural and historical context in which both novels are set, namely depicting the lives of African American citizens at the beginning of the twentieth century, thus in times of racial segregation, including comments on The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its purpose and importance, discussing the issue of lynching of and its consequences and shortly informing about The Great Migration. Ultimately, this chapter also includes an introduction to the idea of The Women’s Suffrage Movement, given that both novels deal with the issue of oppression of women. The following two parts consist of an illumination of the exact time period and the setting of *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* to comprehend the connections that will be discussed later.

The following three chapters of the practical part are dedicated to analysing the chosen novels, depicting selected aspects that occur in the stories and enabling further elaboration, such as racism, sexual abuse, trauma and narrative form. All the elaborated aspects from both novels are compared in the chapter’s conclusion.

The third chapter elaborates on the issue of racism and prejudices held not only by the white majority but also by people of colour in their own community. The explained idea of “racism” in the relevant terminology is applied to specific cases extracted from the novels. Moreover, this chapter also elaborates on the extractions from the novels and analyses them with the support of primary and secondary sources. The final part compares all the identified aspects.

The fourth chapter delves into the most complex subjects of the novels, such as the perception of beauty, discussing the issue of black people feeling diminished by

their skin colour, the impact of rape on one's life and how the protagonists deal with their sexual trauma and analysis of the violent behavioural pattern that male characters seem to apply in their lives. A comparison of these aspects is also included at the very end of the chapter.

The final chapter focuses on analysing the narrative means and literary devices that both Walker and Morrison chose to apply in their novels. The essence of an epistolary novel chosen by Walker is introduced, as well as Morrison's choice of two-perspective narration. The final comparison consists of a brief summary of the differences in the narrative style.

# 1 Relevant Terminology

The term "trauma" is used primarily to describe a situation in a negative context where the individual is at risk of grave danger, injury, or death, such as a car accident, rape, assault but as well as natural disasters like earthquakes and floods. The basis for the creation of trauma is the individual's reaction to a specific traumatic event. Emphasis is also placed on the emotions the individual feels in a particular situation, such as helplessness and fear.<sup>1</sup> The most common consequence of a traumatic situation is the development of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), which reacts to triggers and constantly brings the individual back to the traumatic situation through burning memories. Such triggers include sounds, smells, visions, etc.<sup>2</sup> Although the term "trauma" can be incorporated into many different contexts, this thesis focuses primarily on trauma resulting from childhood sexual abuse. According to a research by the American Psychiatric Association (1994), survivors of childhood sexual abuse are most likely to develop PTSD. Associated aspects of PTSD due to childhood sexual abuse include suicidal tendencies, depression, and psychological problems.<sup>3</sup>

The definition of the term "racism" could be understood as a produced hatred towards one ethnic group by another ethnic group, including verbal as well as physical harassment and segregation, induced from the feeling of superiority by one of the groups. However, the term has much more history and meaning than anyone can imagine. The term was first used in Nazi Germany during the Second World War period, widely targeting Jews and resulting in anti-Semitism ideologies and Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Racism can be divided into various forms – interpersonal, internalized, institutional and structural.

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<sup>1</sup> John N. Briere, and Catherine Scott, *What is trauma. Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment (DSM-5 Update)* (The United States of America: SAGE Publications, 2014), 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> Giulio Perrotta, "Post-traumatic stress disorder: Definition, contexts, neural correlations and cognitive-behavioral therapy". *J Pub Health Catalog*, 2019, 2.2: 40-7.

<sup>3</sup> Nicole P Yuan; Mary P. Koss; Mirto Stone, "The psychological consequences of sexual trauma". 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin P. Bowser, "Racism: Origin and Theory," *Journal of Black Studies* 48, no. 6 (2017): 573.

**Interpersonal racism** can be defined as deliberately inflicting physical, psychological, verbal or discriminatory harm on a dark-skinned person based on the racial ideology of a white person.<sup>5</sup>

**Internalized racism**, defined by Pyke, can be understood as “the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and/or oneself.”<sup>6</sup>

**Institutional racism** is based on policies and procedures of an institution or system that are more favourable to white people unintentionally cause harm to people of colour and put them at a disadvantage.<sup>7</sup>

**Structural racism**, according to Zinzi Bailey, et al., refers to “the totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems of housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care, and criminal justice.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “The Four Types of Racism,” United Way of the National Capital Area, United Way NCA, June 29, 2023, accessed June 5, 2024, <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/levels-of-racism/>.

<sup>6</sup> K. D. Pyke, “What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don’t We Study It? Acknowledging Racism’s Hidden Injuries.” *Sociological Perspectives*, 53 (4), (2010): 553.

<sup>7</sup> United Way of the National Capital Area, “The Four Types of Racism.”

<sup>8</sup> Zinzi D Bailey, Nancy Krieger, Madina Agénor, Jasmine Graves, Natalia Linos, Mary T Bassett, “Structural racism and health inequities in the USA: evidence and interventions.” *The Lancet*, Volume 389, Issue 10077, (2017): 1453.

## 2 Historical and Cultural Background

### 2.1 *African Americans in the First Half of the 20th Century*

The twentieth century was groundbreaking yet still very challenging for African Americans. Both authors, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, draw inspiration from significant events that happened at that time and implement them into their literary works. So, it is crucial to recognise the historical background and importance of the events to analyse and understand both novels, *The Color Purple*, and *The Bluest Eye*. The novels deal with the issues of racism, segregation, abuse, and oppression.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 due to pervasive racial violence and discrimination directed at African Americans. The initial turning point for establishing this civil rights organisation was most notably the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois.<sup>9</sup>

The riot, in which participated over 5 000 white residents of Springfield, was fuelled by a false accusation of two black men, Joe James and George Richardson, of rape and murder. The white mob acted rather peacefully at first, with occasional shouting and insults on behalf of the two accused black men. However, when the situation started to get out of control, people moved on to destroying black businesses, burning down houses, and causing disruption all over the black resident areas, acting primarily out of fear of racial equality and demanding justice for crimes that were, indeed, not committed.<sup>10</sup>

Another one of many acts of black brutality that the NAACP actively fought against was racial lynching. Lynching was a form of brutal physical violence aimed mainly at African Americans, but other ethnic groups were targeted as well to prove white supremacy.<sup>11</sup> Lynching could involve several brutal methods of violence, such as hanging, shooting, burning alive or beating to death. False accusations of crimes mainly drove the mob; for instance, black men faced false accusations of rape of white women.

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<sup>9</sup> August Meier and John H. Bracey Join, "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America,'" *Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (February 1, 1993): 1-28.

<sup>10</sup> James L. Crouthamel, "The Springfield Race Riot of 1908," *The Journal of Negro History* 45, no. 3 (July 1, 1960): 164-81.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Louise Wood and Susan V. Donaldson, "Lynching's Legacy in American Culture," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 61, no. 1/2 (2008): 5-25.

Even after the NAACP campaigned for the abolition of these brutal assaults and even supported the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill in 1918, it took several decades for this form of racial violence to abate.<sup>12</sup>

A transformative mass moment known as The Great Migration refers to African Americans who resettled from the rural South to the industrial North and West in 1916, seeking better opportunities.<sup>13</sup> The cause of this demographic shift was mainly due to the deprivation of labour in the North resulting from World War I. and difficulties in the South such as racial segregation, economic crisis, and Jim Crow laws enforcement. The North was more promising for African Americans, offering better living conditions and a non-racist environment.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 *The Women's Suffrage Movement*

Decades of fighting against the patriarchal society led to the creation of an activist movement based on advocating for women's right to vote in the United States. However, this fight took a nationwide mobilization and perseverance to win, and its roots span way back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Women who participated in this movement had to contend with several hardships and difficulties in pursuing suffrage, such as arrests, imprisonment, and public ridicule. Despite these challenges, they persevered and fought for their right to vote. With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 18, 1920, American women gained civil equality for the first time.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "History of Lynching in America", NAACP, February 11, 2022, accessed January 21, 2024 <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america>.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 209–32.

<sup>14</sup> Rodger Doyle, "The Great Migration," *Scientific American* 290, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>15</sup> Holly J. McCammon et al., "How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements, 1866 to 1919," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 49.

### 2.3 Overview of the Time Period and Setting of *The Color Purple*

Understanding the novel's historical background and setting is crucial in understanding the shaping of the characters' identities and understanding their roots, morals, and behaviour. The depiction of the setting in the novel is not explicitly expressed, yet it is still recognizable through the context and the emotional content.

Even though Walker does not expressly state the exact period in the story itself, as it is for the reader to figure out, it is believed that the time span ranges throughout the first half of the twentieth century and covers roughly thirty years.<sup>16</sup> This period is significant due to the persisting reverberations of the Civil War, high racial tension, and segregation issues. Due to the Great Migration, the South suffered the loss of many Black people as they were searching for better living conditions.<sup>17</sup> This matter is also implied in the novel when the protagonist, Celie, leaves her abusive husband and moves to Memphis to start a better life for herself.

As for the geographical setting, the narrative is set in rural Georgia, USA, portraying the harsh realities of life in the Southern agricultural landscape.<sup>18</sup> There is a brief mention of agricultural labour at the beginning of the novel several times, describing that Celie had to work in a field that her father owned. "He wake up while I'm in the field. I been chopping cotton for three hours by time he comes."<sup>19</sup>

It was typical that even after the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, women not only had to care for the household and the children but worked in the field as well. The legacy of slavery persists in the form of sharecropping and tenant farming, where characters like Celie and her family are bound to the land and work tirelessly to provide for themselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Patricia Harris Abrams, "The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* 1, no. 2 (1985): 2.

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Abrams, "The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*", 2.

<sup>19</sup> Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2017), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Neverdon-Morton, "Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925", 70.

## 2.4 Overview of the Time Period and Setting of *The Bluest Eye*

Even though Morrison started writing this novel in 1962 in New York, the story dates back to 1940, taking place in Lorain, Ohio. The story begins just one year after one of the most crucial stages in American history – The Great Depression.

One can characterize The Great Depression as the biggest economic collapse of all time, spanning from 1929 to 1939.<sup>21</sup> Many people lost their jobs and roof over their heads, leaving only starving mouths with nothing to feed. It is not known for certain what exactly triggered the economic avalanche, as the opinions vary among economists. However, one of the initial processes that contributed to the economic downfall was the sudden change of economic position of the United States due to the First World War. Because of the war and its impact on Europe, the entire economy was in favour of the United States. Economically aiding affected European countries, the United States were suddenly in charge.<sup>22</sup> However, American citizens were too reckless with their vision of a more promising future, which also started the mass trend of “credits”, pulling many Americans into debt. Therefore, the New York Stock Market Crash of 1929 struck them severely, ensuring a decade of hopelessness.<sup>23</sup>

In the very first few pages of the book, one of the main characters, Claudia, explains what it means to be “outdoors”. She claims that the term means absolute poverty and exclusion, stemming from various reasons, such as gambling, food shortage, banishment by own blood or alcoholism. Claudia also mentions that “the threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days”<sup>24</sup>, hinting at the relevancy of the recent economic crisis. The following recovery from the era spans throughout the story, suggesting that many people were trying to dig themselves out of poverty and climb the economic ladder. However, as Morrison implies while introducing the character’s backgrounds to the reader, African Americans were the most disadvantaged group struck by the crisis. The disadvantage of the African American minority is also connected with the pressure that resulted in black people being overly obsessive with ownership, establishment of their businesses, and some sort of “manic” behaviour due to the previous years of horror.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert J. Samuelson, “Revisiting the Great Depression,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2012): 38.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression & the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Google Books, accessed May 24, 2024, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Rauchway, *The Great Depression & the New Deal*, 12.–13.

<sup>24</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 1999), 15.

Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests. Like frenzied, desperate birds, they overdecorated everything; fussed and fidgeted over their hard-won homes; canned, jellied, and preserved all summer to fill the cupboards and shelves; they painted, picked, and poked at every corner of their houses.<sup>25</sup>

It seems that the people were so scared of a repetition of the previous years that they tried to prepare as much as possible just in case another crisis occurred. It is remarkable how human behaviour changes due to traumatic experiences and creates a desire to avoid uncertainty.

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<sup>25</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 16.

### 3 Representation of Racism and Prejudice

#### 3.1 *Racism and Segregation in The Color Purple*

Racism is a commonly and widely used term in today's world. It is also unmistakably connected with centuries of pain, endurance, hope, unification, disappointment, strength and much more. Walker incorporated the problematics of racism into the novel, and it can be elaborated on given particular examples. In addition, it is crucial to recognize which one of the forms of racism, introduced at the beginning of this thesis, the characters of colour experienced.

Sofia's encounter with the mayor and his wife is a blatant case of interpersonal and institutional racism. As Sofia refused the mayor's wife request to take upon being a maid for a white family, it obviously angered the mayor's wife, due to Sofia's reaction being seen as undermining the white authority and obedience. Consequently, Sofia got imprisoned for standing up against white supremacy, refusing to become anyone's slave. Her stay in prison was not a much better experience either, as she was regularly beaten, mistreated and received rather brutal treatment due to her skin colour. Sofia's brutal treatment and the harsh sentence of twelve years of imprisonment reflect institutional racism, showing how the legal system systematically oppresses African Americans.

When I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of an eggplant.<sup>26</sup>

Another incident to be elaborated on that involved racist behaviour took place in Africa, where Nettie travelled as a missionary. The colonial exploitation of the Olinka people by the British points to structural and cultural racism. Structural and cultural racism is evident, considering the Europeans, in order to establish a rubber plantation, had to destroy a village with hundreds of natives without any further care about how this geographical change would influence the inhabitants and undermine their cultural practises, not to mention trying to urbanise them.

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<sup>26</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 82.

Since the Olinka no longer own their village, they must pay rent for it, and in order to use the water, which also no longer belongs to them, they must pay a water tax. At first the people laughed. It really did seem crazy. They've been here forever. But the chief did not laugh. We will fight the white man, they said. But the white man is not alone, said the chief. He has brought his army.<sup>27</sup>

The following quote from the novel depicts how Nettie describes the damage the British did to the Olinka's village. It is evident that the whites would stop at nothing to get their way, completely disregarding everything around them.

It was pitiful, Celie. The people felt so betrayed! They stood by helplessly—they really don't know how to fight, and rarely think of it since the old days of tribal wars— as their crops and then their very homes were destroyed. Yes. The roadbuilders didn't deviate an inch from the plan the headman was following. Every hut that lay in the proposed roadpath was leveled. And, Celie, our church, our school, my hut, all went down in a matter of hours.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, one more situation worth elaborating on is the relationship between Sofia and Miss Millie, specifically when Sofia was teaching Miss Millie to drive a car. Sofia's relationship with the white family has been turbulent from the beginning, considering that their condescending behaviour towards Sofia and Sofia's ballistic reaction to that behaviour got her into jail. However, despite her strong defiance of white supremacy, she still ended up serving as the mayor's wife's maid.

One day, the mayor bought his wife a car since she claimed that "if colored could have cars then one for her was past due"<sup>29</sup>. Miss Millie was happy with her car, except that she did not know how to drive and that her husband did not want to teach her how to drive. So, as a result, she asked Sofia to teach her to drive. The crucial part is when, after some time of Miss Millie's driving lessons, the two of them decide to go for a ride.

Well, say Sofia, I was so use to sitting up there next to her teaching her how to drive, that I just naturally clammed into the front seat. She stood outside on her side the car clearing her throat. Finally she say, Sofia, with a little laugh. This is the South.

Yes ma'am, I say. She clear her throat, laugh some more. Look where you sitting, she say. I'm sitting where I always sit, I say. That's the problem, she say.

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<sup>27</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 95.

Have you ever seen a white person and a colored sitting side by side in a car, when one of 'em wasn't showing the other one how to drive it or clean it? I got out the car, opened the back door and clammed in. She sat down up front.<sup>30</sup>  
This situation does not regard a direct case of racist behaviour but implies it. When

Miss Millie says that Sofia is not allowed to sit at the front with her, let alone drive, it only encourages the thought that the white and the black are still not equal, despite Sofia doing Miss Millie a favour by teaching her how to drive. It seems as if whatever a black person tries to accomplish, it always goes underappreciated.

## **Representation of Racism and Prejudice**

### *3.2 Racism and Segregation in The Bluest Eye*

African American writers widely use the depiction of racism in their literary works to reflect on their own life experiences, as presumably most of them did experience some form of racial oppression or discrimination. They transmit these experiences into their novels to express a realistic picture of the periods when white supremacy was at its peak. However, the depiction of racism in *The Bluest Eye* is somewhat untraditional, as there are very few white characters. Racism in the novel occurs in the form of internalized racism, thus among people of colour, instead of interpersonal racism, which signifies racial prejudices coming from a white individual. The perception of racism is also closely tied to the perception of beauty, as one of the main aspects of the novel is the difference between white “cleanliness” and black “ugliness”.

A most significant aspect of internalised racism can be analysed as the rivalry between light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks. The result of this conflict turned the light-skinned people despising the dark-skinned due to their prejudices of barbarianism, ugliness, and dirtiness, and the dark-skinned loathed the light-skinned, considering their privileged nature and shallow attitude. This problem occurs when Maureen Peal, the “disrupter of seasons”<sup>31</sup>, according to Claudia, enters the life of the three dark-skinned black girls. Frieda and Claudia seem to transform their jealousy of Maureen into hatred based on how they comment on her physical appearance, the

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<sup>30</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 60.

clothes she wears and her “posh” attitude. The girls even notice that Maureen is extraordinarily favoured by both the students and the teachers due to her lighter skin colour.

A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me.<sup>32</sup>

Another exemplification of internalised racism appears in Geraldine’s story. The narrator reveals that Geraldine belongs to a middle-classed light-skinned family and despises, in her words, “niggers”. She passes on her preconception of dark-skinned people to her son, Louis Junior. Geraldine’s hatred towards the dark-skins partially influences how she raises her son. Consequently, she forbids Louis Junior to interact with “niggers”. However, this attitude only forces her son to want to socialise with the black kids even more. Geraldine even explains to him the difference between “coloured people” and “niggers” according to her own conviction.

He hated to see the swings, slides, monkey bars, and seesaws empty and tried to get kids to stick around as long as possible. White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud.<sup>33</sup>

Junior used to long to play with the black boys. More than anything in the world he wanted to play King of the Mountain and have them push him down the mound of dirt and roll over him. He wanted to feel their hardness pressing on him, smell their wild blackness, and say "Fuck you" with that lovely casualness. He wanted to sit with them on curb-stones and compare the sharpness of jackknives, the distance and arcs of spitting. In the toilet he wanted to share with them the laurels of being able to pee far and long.<sup>34</sup>

Geraldine’s obsession with light-skinned supremacy, besides taming her son’s “nature”, also influenced his physical appearance. In conclusion, Geraldine attempted to make her son look more “white” than “black” by dressing him a certain way, cutting his hair as short as possible or making sure that his skin did not “ash”. Moreover, by the looks of it, Geraldine’s greatest fear was to be associated with dark-skinned people, so she tried to do everything in her power to prevent it

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<sup>32</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 84-85.

<sup>34</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 85.

Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool, the part was etched into his hair by the barber. In winter his mother put Jergens Lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen. Even though he was light-skinned, it was possible to ash. The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant.<sup>35</sup>

Another appearance of racism emerges from an encounter with Pecola and a shopkeeper. Pecola came to Mr. Yacobowski's shop with vegetables, fruits and candy to buy sweets. However, the narrator's main focus lies in the depiction of the shopkeeper's racist behaviour. As the name "Yacobowski" indicates, he was presumably an immigrant with origin somewhere in Central Europe and, therefore, white. The narrator even reveals this fact by stating:

How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary.<sup>36</sup>

This extract indicates that for white people, black people were so unimportant that they did not even care enough to fully acknowledge their presence, let alone their existence. The encounter continues with Mr. Yacobowski's sketchy attitude towards Pecola, which is evident from something as simple as him not wanting to touch Pecola's hand when she handed him the money. It is evident that Pecola is aware of his disgust, and for a fact, she blames it on her skin colour, as she thinks that "the distaste must be for her, blackness."<sup>37</sup>

An important detail to acknowledge is also the way how Pecola communicates with the shopkeeper. She is quiet, shy, quite possibly intimidated by the white man and even embarrassed. She quite possibly understands the circumstances in which she has to look like a minimal threat to others. – "She points her finger at the Mary Janes-a little black shaft of finger, its tip pressed on the display window. The quietly inoffensive assertion of a black child's attempt to communicate with a white adult."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 46.

<sup>37</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 47.

### 3.3 *Comparison of Analysed Aspects*

The problem of racism is evident in both novels; however, each novel depicts the issue slightly differently. Whereas in *The Color Purple*, the characters have to endure several forms of racism, such as interpersonal, institutional and structural, the characters in *The Bluest Eye* are somewhat more likely to encounter internalized racism due to the lack of white characters. Morrison focused more on racism among one ethnic group, and Walker, on the other hand, instead conceptualized racism as a system-wide issue. In addition, Morrison closely tied the issue of racism with the perception of beauty.

## 4 Female Characters, Impact of Rape on Women and Violent Male Behaviour Towards Women

### 4.1 *Female Empowerment, Trauma, and Sexuality in The Color Purple*

Both novels, *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* discuss the importance of female power, including the everyday problems that black women had to face. This chapter focuses and elaborates on how black female characters deal with social injustices, including dealing with trauma and racial injustice and sexual harassment, which will be presented on specific situations, where domestic abuse, sexual abuse and child exploitation occur, supported by direct quotations, analysis of the situations and possible interpretation. Nevertheless, the focus is also on secondary issues such as discovering sexuality, perception of beauty and analysis of men and their behaviour towards women.

As there are many female characters in the novel, it is only appropriate to break down each of their personalities, enlightening their behaviour and how they navigate their journey throughout the book. The best concept of this analysis is a comparison, explicitly comparing some female characters to the four classical elements - fire, earth, air, and water, to demonstrate the difference in how each woman is portrayed.

Starting strong with the fire element, Sophia would probably be the best fit. Her assertive nature and robust and fierce soul that cannot be tamed just prove very characteristic of her. She also possesses the power to stand up for herself and others, contrary to the other female characters who would not have the strength to do that. On the other hand, Sophia seems to be self-destructive with her fiery spirit and keeps getting into all sorts of trouble throughout the story, for instance, punching the mayor and going to jail.

The earth element could be described as loyal, grounded, reliable and practical. Shug Avery proved herself to be the support that Celie needed so much to rise against her abusive husband. One could say that Shug Avery is a typical example of a fire element, but her personality development suggests otherwise. Later in the story, she provides Celie with very intense care and love that Celie has never felt before.

The air element is mainly depicted as curious, intellectual, and communicative, which directs us to Nettie. She is independent and intelligent, and her ability to observe her surroundings and the world around her in deeper meaning is her fundamental

characteristic trait. For example, in her letters, she described her life in Africa to Celie in great detail and wisdom.

Celie is like the water element, at least at the novel's beginning. She is resilient, emotional, and adaptable. She would flow with the situation rather than resist it, showing how considerate she was of others but also profoundly oppressed by not having her own voice. Celie undergoes a significant transformation throughout the story, like water that flows and changes its shape over time. She learns to navigate and overcome the challenges of her life and ultimately finds healing and acceptance.

In conclusion, all the women in the story behave differently according to their personalities, beliefs, and abilities. Nonetheless, they all share some characteristic traits, making them more understanding and helpful towards one another.

Celie's connection to men is rather dismissive from the beginning of the novel. However, it obviously does not improve throughout the story as even more harm comes Celie's way at the hands of men. This subchapter is supposed to examine the subtle hints that Walker incorporated into the story, suggesting that Celie did not fancy the male gender in any way. The most frequent form of abuse in the novel is physical abuse

The first mention of any men in the novel is Celie's stepfather Alphonso, who sexually molested her when she was fourteen years old and got her pregnant with two children, which he later sold to an infertile couple. At the beginning of the novel, Celie talks about her stepfather and how he is never satisfied with anything she does. It is more than possible that Celie's feeling of "unworthiness" that she carries with herself throughout the novel is mainly Alphonso's fault, as he was never a good father to her, and she could never fathom why.

"He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got somethin in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them."<sup>39</sup>

Celie's dislike of men evidently starts with her father being abusive. However, the fact that she grew up in rural Southern Georgia, where black men and women had specifically divided labour and chores, might be another aspect that influenced her attitude towards men. Her tolerance regarding the savage behaviour coming from men

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<sup>39</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 7.

suggests that she was taught to obey not only the men in the family but men in general as superior human beings.

Another man who tormented Celie was her abusive husband, Mr \_\_\_\_\_, alias Albert. When Albert's wife died, he was left with four children and no woman figure to take care of them. Albert originally wanted to marry Celie's younger sister, Nettie, but their father said that Nettie was too young to marry, and that Albert should take Celie instead. How Walker describes the "courtship" of Celie and Albert is concrete proof of how little her father thought of her. He declares that Celie is ugly and not smart and tells lies, presumably in case Celie would try to tell Albert about her father's abuse. When Albert comes again to look at Celie before he decides to marry her, her father tells her to spin around and show off her body to Mr \_\_\_\_\_. This experience must have been incredibly degrading for young women just waiting to be good enough for someone to take their hand in marriage. Although Albert did not want to marry Celie initially, he eventually did.

His abusive actions towards Celie can be interpreted by various reasons, such as her not fulfilling his expectations of being a good wife, but mainly due to the fact that he was in love with Shug Avery. He and Shug wanted to marry, but his parents disapproved of her. Therefore, he was angry at Celie for not being Shug, the woman he really loved and wanted to marry. Another reason for his abuse towards Celie might be Nettie's rejection when he tried to take advantage of her, which was also the reason why she ran away. Thus, Albert hid all the letters from Nettie addressed to Celie.

In conclusion, he wanted to hurt them both out of his own misery and pride. His behaviour is a demonstration of the toxic masculinity and patriarchal values that pervade the society depicted in the novel.

One more man who later disappointed Celie was surprisingly God himself. Since Celie initially addressed her letters to God to share her thoughts and sorrow, she trusted and looked up to him. Despite that, after discovering that Albert was hiding Nettie's letters from Celie, her faith completely vanished, and she claimed that God was just another disappointment in the form of a man. This claim became significantly important for Celie as she finally saw the light and concluded that no man should ever control her again, not even God himself.

Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the others mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown. She say, Miss Celie. You better hush. God might hear you. Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, the impact of male behaviour on women is one of the most crucial themes of this novel. It shows how influential it can become considering that men at that time were taught that abusing women makes them shaped to their desires, in addition to women having practically zero voice and respect.

One of the novel's central themes is female empowerment and how women can share their love and support. Although Celie's sexuality is not specified, her admiration for Shug Avery is evident since the first mention. She expresses her liking of how Shug looks, behaves, and sings. Given the fact that Shug Avery was not very warm towards Celie when Albert took her to live with them when Shug was ill, no one would probably expect these two women to grow more than fond of each other. However, at one point in the story, Celie and Shug's relationship becomes somewhat different from a usual friendship. They explore each other's bodies, kiss, and talk about love and passion. There is also an indication of them having sex. It is essential to consider from which perspective to look at this relationship and how it evolved throughout the novel.

Celie knew Shug from her performances and immediately fancied her. When Celie's husband, Albert, brought Shug Avery home to live with them and care for her due to her illness, Shug and Celie did not get along. Presumably, due to her illness, Shug was mainly hostile towards Celie and treated her like her maid and caretaker. However, the more time the girls spend together, the stronger their bond grew. After Shug overcame her illness and got back to her charming, healthy self, she expressed gratitude to Celie for being kind to her at her worst times, which made Celie trust Shug and confide in her about her husband's violent behaviour. When Celie and Shug start talking about sexual desires and what it means to be loved, two different points of view clash together. While Shug tries to explain to Celie that sex is not just about the man's needs and is supposed to be an act of love and lust, Celie has an entirely different experience due to her husband's violent nature and lack of respect for her as a woman and a human being. Her description of how sleeping with Albert makes her feel is alarming, at least.

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<sup>40</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 173.

You like to sleep with him? I ast. Yeah, Celie, she say, I have to confess, I just love it. Don't you? Naw, I say. Mr \_\_\_\_\_ can tell you, I don't like it at all. What is it to like? He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep. She start to laugh. Do his business, she say. Do his business. Why, Miss Celie. You make it sound like he going to the toilet on you. That what it feel like, I say. She stop laughing. You never enjoy it at all? she ast, puzzle. Not even with your children daddy? Never, I say.<sup>41</sup>

The entire conversation about sexual desires, love and feelings left Shug in utter shock and made her show Celie what it means to be loved during sexual intercourse and that her desires and needs are just as important. Nevertheless, as Lewis claims, Shug made sure that Celie got at least a snippet from a sexual education by showing her how to masturbate, which is supposed to imply her independence from men.<sup>42</sup> With this gesture, Shug wanted to remind Celie that she does not need any man to feel good. As of this moment, presumably for the first time in her life, Celie felt truly loved.

From Celie's point of view, it is evident that she fell in love with both Shug's soul and body. However, it is not clear how or if her sexuality changed throughout the book. There is some evidence that might indicate that during the romantic relationship with Shug, while living in Memphis, Celie started to discover her sexuality. At the very end of the book, when Celie and Albert are talking on the porch about how important Shug is to both of them, they both have a change of heart of one another. When Albert asks Celie to remarry him out of love and respect this time, Celie declines.

“And then, when Mr \_\_\_\_\_ done ast me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don't like frogs, but let's us be friends, Shug write me she coming home.”<sup>43</sup>

Celie assimilates men with frogs due to their cold nature and the fact that men never gave her any sense of comfort or true love. Moreover, given the trauma that stems from her experiences with men, Celie starts to notice how different and more comfortable she feels around Shug. Considering the time period of the novel and Celie's lack of education, it is less likely that Celie actually labelled herself as a “lesbian” or

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<sup>41</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 73-74.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher S. Lewis, “Cultivating Black Lesbian Shamelessness: Alice Walker's ‘The Color Purple.’” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, (2012): 162.

<sup>43</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 257.

“bisexual”; she most presumably acted solely upon her feelings without any further knowledge of homosexuality.

Shug’s point of view might indicate that the romantic relationship with Celie was probably just another of many experiences for her, given her untamed personality. The main question that arises from this statement is whether Shug felt the same desires for Celie as Celie did for her. Shug Avery is described as a free-spirited blues singer who is naturally manipulative and selfish. Nonetheless, her relationship with Celie makes her a better person throughout the novel. Her sexuality, just like Celie’s, is not specified in the novel. However, it is apparent from the context that her sexuality could be described as fluid, hinting at previous sexual relationships with both men and women. However, despite her “wild” nature, it seems that she truly cared for Celie and held feelings for her.

## **Female Characters, Impact of Rape on Women and Violent Male Behaviour Towards Women**

### *4.2 Perception of Beauty, Trauma, and Sexual Abuse in The Bluest Eye*

When talking about beauty, there is no place for judgment. Everyone perceives beauty differently, and as Singh claims, the term is most frequently connected to body image and physical attractiveness. One’s body can easily influence self-perception and invoke both positive and negative feelings and measurements of “attractiveness”. As Singh points out, beauty standards change constantly throughout each decade, and with that, the perception of beauty also changes.<sup>44</sup>

The perception of beauty is one of the critical aspects of the novel, and it is vital to understand how Morrison depicts it in order to sympathise with the young black girls who are experiencing a rough adolescence. The most apparent issue that occurs in the novel is racial self-loathing and hating of one’s own black skin. The socially respected standard of beauty is nothing other than “white beauty” and purity, connected with white supremacy. On the contrary, “blackness” was considered ugly and primitive. The characters develop a sense of self-worth based on these concepts of beauty. Beauty and ugliness then turn into internalized conditions that have a devastating impact on the

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<sup>44</sup> Raj Kishor Singh, “Body Aesthetic Myths in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”, *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities* 5 (2023): 26.

lives of the characters. The novel suggests that the Breedlove family is fixated on poverty because they believe they are ugly. Pecola believes that she deserves the abuse she experiences at home based on her perceived ugliness.

As Gooden claims, this perception of “white beauty” resulted in many African Americans bleaching their skin with harmful chemicals in order to lighten their skin color.<sup>45</sup> In the novel, Morrison introduces a black but light-skinned character named Maureen Peal. Maureen comes from a wealthy family, and her arrival at school makes the three girls jealous of how differently others treat her, especially because she has lighter skin. This points to the fact that light-skinned black people received better treatment than naturally darker black people.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, this could also be classified as internalised racism since the differences in attitude applied not only to white people but dark-skinned black people as well. It seems interesting that Claudia and Frieda tried so hard to find any possible flaws in Maureen that they indeed did. They mention that Maureen had “a dog tooth and she had been born with six fingers on each hand and that there was a little bump where each extra one had been removed”.<sup>47</sup> Maureen’s flaws prove that even though she seems perfect mainly because of her skin, light eyes and hair, there are also imperfections.

To grasp the perception of beauty and dive into it, it is essential to elaborate on the book title that refers to “the bluest eye”. The meaning behind the title is straightforward yet alarming and sorrowful. Morrison states in her foreword that the inspiration for the book was a brief conversation with her elementary school classmate, who claimed that she wanted blue eyes because they were beautiful, and she wanted to be perceived beautiful. Morrison did not share her classmate’s vision and instead tried to think about why the girl would want such a thing. More importantly, how did she conclude she was not beautiful? This conversation resulted in Morrison creating a character who was obsessed with having blue eyes – Pecola Breedlove.

The first mention of such thing as “white beauty” occurs at the beginning of the novel, when Pecola Breedlove comes to the MacTeer family after her father, Cholly Breedlove, burns her house down. The three girls, Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, eat snacks when Frieda brings Pecola a cup of milk. The cup has the image of Shirley Temple on it, and Pecola seems to adore it.

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<sup>45</sup> Amoaba Gooden, "Visual Representations of Feminine Beauty in the Black Press: 1915-1950," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011): 82.

<sup>46</sup> Gooden, "Visual Representations of Feminine Beauty in the Black Press: 1915-1950.", 82.

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 61.

Shirley Temple was a white child actress with dimples and blue eyes, and her image was also used for advertisements for several products, but mainly for dolls. She was the embodiment of the white ideal of beauty, constructed by the society. As duCille says: “Historically, popular culture's "silent" affirmation of perfect whiteness has occurred at the expense of those who fall outside the dominant blond-is-beautiful, white-is-right construct.”<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, Shirley was not just an innocent child star. As duCille suggests, she was often sexualised and portrayed characters inappropriately for her age, for instance “femme fatale in a series of sexy one-reelers called *Baby Burlesks*”.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, Pecola and Frieda are absolutely mesmerised by Shirley; Claudia does not seem to share their adoration of the little girl. In fact, she hated Shirley Temple and every other girl who looked like her – white, blue-eyed, blond, and privileged. She describes her hatred for a white doll that her parents gave her for Christmas, which had Shirley’s appearance. She claims that she does not love the doll despite knowing what society expects her to do with it – care for and treasure it like it is her own child. The way that Claudia expresses her hatred towards the Baby Doll suggests that due to being the youngest of the three girls, she herself is not yet in the phase, like her sister, her parents or Pecola, where she would admit to herself that white beauty is superior to black beauty. Claudia did not only hate the doll; she wanted to destroy it. In other words, destroy the doll to find what exactly it is that society finds “lovable” about them. As she did just that, Claudia was met with frowning adults, accusing her of not being grateful enough for having such a nice toy.

“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.”<sup>50</sup>

The vital thing to take into consideration is that Claudia never asked for dolls, and neither did her parents ask her what she wanted. They just boldly assumed she would be enthusiastic about the dolls out of their conviction that this particular toy is what every little girl, whether black or white, desires.

On the other hand, Pecola had a different outlook on “white beauty” than Claudia. Moreover, she desired to be seen just as beautiful as the little blonde actress. In

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<sup>48</sup> Ann duCille, “The Shirley Temple of My Familiar.” *Transition*, no. 73 (January 1, 1997): 13.

<sup>49</sup> duCille, “The Shirley Temple of My Familiar.”, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 18.

fact, it is to be discovered that she was so obsessed with the image of Shirley Temple that she drank three quarts of milk, simply for the fact that the mug had Shirley's face on it. She associated things that screamed "white and pretty" with the feeling of worthiness and desire to fulfil her wish of having blue eyes.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Pecola's deepest desire was to have blue eyes. Morrison provides several explanations for why the girl wishes for such thing. Blue eyes are collectively perceived as a symbol of absolute purity and beauty. The characters in the novel are aware that whiteness and purity mean privilege and a comfortable life. That might be one of the reasons why Pecola would desire to possess blue eyes, as her life is far from comfortable. Her father, Cholly, is a drunk man that only cares for himself, not to mention he rapes Pecola, his own daughter, and impregnates her. Her mother, obsessed with white beauty and cleanliness, prefers to take care of a stranger, a little white girl from a family that she works for, to take care of her own child. Her brother, Samuel, who is a few years older than Pecola, keeps running away from the madness they call "home".

Another possible reason for Pecola wanting blue eyes could be her desire to be perceived physically beautiful by others, resulting in people changing their behaviour towards her. Pecola is certain that if she had blue eyes, no bad things would happen in front of her own eyes, which is possibly a defence mechanism, given what horrible things she sees at home.

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, maybe 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."<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, Pecola believes that blue eyes would ensure her of receiving better treatment, based on her conviction that "beautiful" people are not just treated differently as human beings but also that people are more cautious of their actions in front of "blue eyes" not to disgrace their beauty. A striking example of this behaviour could be analysed in the situation when Pecola is surrounded by a bunch of boys, black boys, who harass her with racial remarks and call her "Black e mo", absolutely

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<sup>51</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 44.

disregarding the fact that they have dark skin as well. Claudia, Frieda, and Maureen were witnesses to this incident, and after a while, Frieda decided to help Pecola. She was bickering with the boys for a while, exchanging an insult or two, but the boys did not seem too intimidated. Just when one of the boys was ready to swing at Frieda, Maureen stepped in. After that, the boys immediately stopped and disappeared. - “Maureen appeared at my elbow, and the boys seemed reluctant to continue under her springtime eyes so wide with interest. They buckled in confusion, not willing to beat up three girls under her watchful gaze.”<sup>52</sup>

This situation proves that Maureen, as a light-skinned person, had more control over the situation than Frieda and convinced the boys to stop solely because they fancied Maureen and did not want to embarrass themselves in front of her.

Sexual activities are mentioned quite frequently throughout the novel, spanning from the perception of sex by young adolescent girls to incestuous sexual abuse. Most of the adult characters interpret sex as something forceful instead of an act of love, resulting in most of them connecting sex with bitter memories and possible traumatic experiences. Morrison provides the reader with multiple fragments from the backstory of various characters to enlighten the characters’ behaviour and motives. The first matter to analyse is the male characters’ background, specifically Cholly Breedlove and Soaphead Church, to get acquainted with their past, as the analysis of their past experiences enables elaboration on their present behaviour and how men comprehend sex and sexual desires.

The first character to be analysed is Cholly Breedlove – the aggressor. His story starts with his presumably mentally unstable mother, who abandoned him and placed him on a pile of garbage when he was a newborn. His Great Aunt, Jimmy, rescued him and beat Cholly’s mother for trying to kill her son, making her flee shortly after the incident. He never knew his father either, making Aunt Jimmy the only “parent figure” he had ever known. Jimmy died when Cholly was only fourteen years old, and since then, he had no one.

After Jimmy’s funeral, Cholly went into the woods with friends. When he is alone with a girl called Darlene, this is the moment when he experiences having sex for the first time. This intimate moment is unfortunately disturbed by two white men who

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<sup>52</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 64-65.

force Cholly to continue having intercourse with Darlene and “rape” her for their amusement. This moment is probably the foundation of Cholly’s trauma, stemming from the absolute feeling of helplessness and humiliation. An interesting observation about this situation is that Cholly decided to direct his anger and hate towards Darlene and not the two white men. However, why Cholly blames Darlene instead of the men is not justified. His behaviour would suggest that a particular part of him knows that he cannot hate the white men, as it would consume him, so instead, he creates hatred for all women. After this encounter, Cholly paranoidly concludes that Darlene might be pregnant. Scared of the responsibility he would have to take, Cholly leaves the city to look for his father in Macon, Georgia. This decision is an exact repetition of his father’s behaviour when he abandoned him.

When Cholly gets to Macon, he finds his father drunk and gambling. His father had no desire to find out who he was and mistakes him for a creditor for child support. Cholly is so devastated that he defecates himself from straining so hard from crying. Melting all of his traumas together, the encounter with his father probably shaped his future the most. In fact, Cholly resembled his father more with each year, not caring about anything or anyone. He gave into alcohol, prostitutes, gambling, feeling nothing and everything at the same time. His life started to turn around when he met Pauline, his future wife; however, this was only for a short period of time. He was drinking heavily and did not provide any care for Pauline. When Pauline found out she was pregnant, Cholly was happy, which temporarily improved their relationship. However, shortly after Samuel was born, Cholly realised he had nothing to give the child. In fact, he had no idea how to raise children, which refers to the endless cycle of “bad parenting”, as he had never experienced a parent love himself. So, when Pauline announced the second pregnancy with Pecola this time, he did not care at all.

But the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be.<sup>53</sup>

Another character worth elaborating on is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, alias Soaphead Church. His past experiences are less crucial than Cholly’s; however, his character remains complex to analyse. It is known that he comes from an academically

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<sup>53</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 158.

motivated family, and his father beat him. Morrison refers to him as “misanthrope”, meaning that he feels disgusted by the human species and its flaws. In addition, it is mentioned that he is strangely fond of things that have a human trace on them, as that is the only form of human contact he can handle. Due to this indisposition, he also values objects that have personal meaning to him more than people. It is disclosed that when Elihue was seventeen, he had a brief romantic relationship with a girl called Velma. She found Elihue’s unconventional personality intriguing and set in her mind that she could change him.

Nevertheless, two months into their marriage, Velma admitted to herself that she could do nothing for him and that their relationship would never work, as their personalities were quite the polar opposites. Eventually, Velma left Elihue and he never really got over her abandonment. He believed she was the answer to his miserable life, which lacked any sense of fulfilment. After his failed relationship with Velma, he decided to pursue his academic accomplishments even more, probably to distract him from the heartache. Elihue obviously struggled with self-discovery, and when his father refused to support him any longer, he found himself in a difficult financial situation. Elihue found himself fit for church activities as he became a “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams.”<sup>54</sup>. As a priest, he found his calling in helping people achieve their desires by falsely acquiring God-like power.

As a part of Soaphead’s story, the reader finds out that his obsession with “cleanliness” and “purity” somehow transmits into paedophilic tendencies. It is mentioned that he hated any material produced by the human body – body odour, ear wax, blackheads. The disgust for the “filthy” human body resulted in his interest in children, as he perceived them as “clean”. He was first interested in little boys; however, he later concluded that he was not ready to explore homosexuality and that little girls were more accessible to seduce and manage. He expresses his desires for little girls, explicitly explaining what attracts him to them. Although Soaphead claims that he has no desire to have sex with the little girls or kiss them, he enjoys touching them, describing how good their breasts feel.

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<sup>54</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 163.

The sight of dried matter in the corner of the eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, skin crusts—all the natural excretions and protections on the body was capable of—disquieted him. His attentions therefore gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive—children.<sup>55</sup>

Sexual domestic abuse is one of the most frequent forms of exploitation. Research provided by WHO states that women are more likely to become victims of sexual abuse than men. This claim stems from the patriarchal system, which states that women are seen as the weaker gender and supports toxic masculinity, that men are naturally superior and dominant over women.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, men in the novel use sex to oppress women, and most of their actions stem from their own sexual traumatic incidents. For instance, Cholly's apparent reason for raping Pecola reaches way back to his first sexual experience, as he was humiliated and used and the overall sense of betrayal from people that were supposed to take care of him. Moreover, when he saw Pecola in the kitchen, washing dishes, he felt numerous feelings all at once—pity, guilt, anger, numbness, love- and acted on those feelings. He felt hopeless, unable to give his daughter love or comfort, angered by the fact that Pecola did not look happy for an eleven-year-old child. In his eyes, Pecola had everything she needed, in other words, more than he ever had. Cholly gets overwhelmed by the feeling of unworthiness, questioning how his daughter is capable of loving such a hopeless man like him. His lack of love, which he never received from his parents, made him question himself in every way.

What could he do for her—ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him—the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and of life could be useful to her?<sup>57</sup>

However, an interesting observation occurs when Morrison depicts the moment Pecola gets raped by Cholly. While Cholly is standing at the door, drunk, and all kinds of unspoken emotions collide inside him, Pecola, probably not aware of his presence,

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<sup>55</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Ichwati Yuliana, Fabiola Dharmawanti Kurnia, Ali Mustofa, "Domestic Violence towards Women Characters as Seen in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*. 5. (2020): 1708.

<sup>57</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 159.

scratches the back of her calf with her toe. An innocent gesture that turns out to be not so innocent. This gesture is, in fact, what Pauline, Cholly's wife, did when they first met in Kentucky. Assuming by his internal storm of emotions, this is probably what triggered him to do the unthinkable.

The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe—that was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her in Kentucky. Leaning over a fence staring at nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protective-ness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth. He did it then, and started Pauline into laughter. He did it now.<sup>58</sup>

It looks like this simple gesture sent his mind back to when he felt the happiest in his life, with Pauline. This observation does not make his actions any more justifiable; however, perhaps his intention was not to harm Pecola but to desperately show her love in the only way he knew how. In a rush of emotions, he raped his daughter.

Further analysis is based on how differently women in the novel perceive sex apart from men. Younger girls connect sex with love and pleasure. They are excited for their “first” and interpret sex as an essential part of their transition to womanhood. However, given their lack of knowledge and experience due to their young age, the girls do not fully comprehend the concept of sex that occurs among adults. To demonstrate this claim, when Frieda and Claudia are talking about how Mr. Henry tried to molest Frieda, Claudia is curious as to how it felt when Mr. Henry touches Frieda's breasts, in the conviction that it is “supposed to” feel good. This example proves that Claudia was too young to separate the idea of molestation and consensual sexual activity.

To interpret a different perspective, it is suitable to analyse Geraldine's attitude towards sexual activities. Geraldine is a light-skinned wealthy woman with “noble” origins who believes in light-skinned supremacy. She is obsessed with cleanliness and physical appearance. Her character is rather cold and inexpressive. When it comes to her sexual desires, she sees it more as a burden, something that she “owns” to her husband for providing for the family and from the social norm that wives must obey

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<sup>58</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 160.

their husband's needs. Thus, her sexual experiences are not based on violence or disrespect but on utter obligation. Morrison even describes Geraldine's feelings and thoughts during sex with her husband, how she does not like how her husband touches her, how he is not allowed to mess up her look, and what is more, she even pretends to have an orgasm to hurry the deed. The following excerpt supports the fact that Geraldine's mind is elsewhere during sexual intercourse.

She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat—the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs—she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist.<sup>59</sup>

However, it is evident that deep down, she desires to actually enjoy her sexual activities with her husband and feel the actual sensation of an orgasm. She describes a situation when she felt that sensation and that was when her “sanitary pad” moved around in her pants, probably rubbing against her sensitive parts enough to induce an orgasm. Geraldine cannot understand why she does not get that feeling when her husband is inside her. Geraldine's feelings about sex demonstrate that the intimate relationship between her and her husband is strictly obligatory and emotionless.

Pecola was not the only child character who experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour. The next part to analyse is the comparison of how the community responded to Pecola's rape and Frieda's molestation by Mr. Henry.

Mr. Henry appears relatively rarely in the novel, as he is not a primary character. However, it is known that he came to the MacTeer family as a boarder. At first, he is friendly with the sisters, and one would hardly expect him to have ulterior motives. As described in the novel, Mr. Henry came to Frieda when he found himself in a favourable situation and started touching her inappropriately. Despite Frieda's initial shock, she managed to run away to tell her parents what happened. After that, Frieda's father violently confronted Mr. Henry, and her mother hit him with a broom. Moreover, another person, possibly a neighbour who came with a gun, participated in this confrontation. Considering Frieda's situation, she had someone to stand up for her and shield her from the bad things – a responsible adult figure. Even though some people said that Frieda has been “ruined”, she still had support in her closest circle.

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<sup>59</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 82.

"I told Mama, and she told Daddy, and we all come home, and he was gone, so we waited for him, and when Daddy saw him come up on the porch, he threw our old tricycle at his head and knocked him off the porch."

"Did he die?"

"Naw. He got up and started singing Nearer My God to Thee.' Then Mama hit him with a broom and told him to keep the Lord's name out of his mouth, but he wouldn't stop, and Daddy was cussing, and everybody was screaming."<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about Pecola's experience. When the rumours about Pecola being pregnant surfaced among the public, she was mostly met with disgust instead of sympathy. Obviously, the idea of incest is "disgusting", not to mention with a minor. However, some people even speculated about the situation, depicting Pecola as just as guilty instead of the victim. They even mentioned that the child should not live, as it would be the ugliest thing. Only the MacTeer sisters sympathised with Pecola, wishing for the baby to live. Regardless of how thoughtful the sisters were, they most probably did not understand the fact that it would be better for the unborn child never to see the light.

The truth is, apparently, Cholly raped Pecola twice. First, when he came home drunk out of his mind, he saw Pecola washing the dishes and then some other time when she was reading on a couch. Pecola mentions that when she is, by the looks of it, talking to an imaginary person after she went completely mad from "getting her blue eyes". The most disturbing fact is that Pecola's mother did not believe her own daughter when she confided in her and told her about her father's actions. In conclusion, no one stood up for Pecola. Both adult figures who were supposed to be responsible and protect her failed her.

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<sup>60</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 98.

### 4.3 *Comparison of Analysed Aspects*

Discussing sexual abuse, perception of beauty, trauma and male behaviour is an essential part of both novels, as both authors seem to make it the centre of both stories. Both Walker and Morrison depict male characters in the same light – yearning for power and recognition. The male characters also possess the power of using sex as a tool of oppression against women. Non-consensual sexual intercourse is presumably the key factor of both novels, resulting in young women, practically children, bearing the burden of being “ruined” at a very young age by adult men, more specifically their family members. Regarding the perception of beauty, *The Bluest Eye* seems more focused on this aspect than *The Color Purple*. However, the aspect of beauty is slightly touched even in *The Color Purple*, occasionally addressing the issue of social conviction that being black means being “ugly”. The most noticeable difference is how the protagonist female characters deal with trauma. Whereas Celie works her way through her trauma and finds salvation, Pecola’s trauma consumes her entirely. Celie’s most significant advantage over Pecola is her family and even her own character development. Considering that Pecola had no one to help her deal with her trauma, it is no surprise that she succumbed to madness.

## 5 Narrative Structure, Point of View, and Linguistic Devices

### 5.1 *Form and Narration in The Color Purple*

The form and the narrative are crucial and significant in the novel, as it discloses many aspects about the protagonist and other vital factors. The epistolary novel is a specific literary genre that allows a particular character to express themselves using a letter-writing method and gives the reader direct insight into their thoughts and feelings. The evolution of this genre presumably dates back to ancient times, but as this genre became popular mainly in the early eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson would be the most significant figure that represents it with his work *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*.<sup>61</sup> Other well-known authors also aspire towards this genre, for instance, Mary Shelley with her work *Frankenstein* or Bram Stoker with *Dracula*.<sup>62</sup>

Even Walker herself chose to use the epistolary novel narration for this book.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the entire novel is written in the form of letters, which the narrator and protagonist, Celie, addresses mainly to God. However, roughly halfway through the story, there is a switch in perspectives, and the letters are now written from the point of view of Celie's sister, Nettie. After some of these letters, there is another switch in perspectives; this time, Celie is writing to Nettie. Perhaps one of the most intriguing things is that the letters are in no particular order given the time or place, which makes it quite challenging to understand all the connections, as one must look for the tiniest details and clues.

The initial element to examine is the directing of the letters to God. Celie is a young girl who is experiencing a tough time in her life since her mother is ill, her stepfather is sexually molesting her, getting her pregnant two times already, and her husband is physically and mentally abusing her. The very beginning of the book opens with a simple quote, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy."<sup>64</sup> This sentence suggests that it presumably originated from Celie's father, who is fearful that Celie might reveal his actions to someone. She knew that if she were to tell her mother about the horrors her husband was inflicting upon her daughter, it

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<sup>61</sup> Simon Sunka, "Epistolary Novel", *Encyclopedia Of German Literature*, (2000): 255.

<sup>62</sup> Gopika Nair, "Tracing *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* as Epistolary Novels:", *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN TECHNOLOGY*, (June 2022): 429.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Donnelly, *Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works* (Routledge, 2009), 95.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 3.

would only make the entire situation worse, and Celie was determined to protect her mother from being harmed. This hints at why Celie addresses her letters to God, as he is the only symbol of trust and comfort she has ever known. Celie believes that God would understand her pain.

For Celie, letter writing is also a way to deal with her thoughts, emotions, and complaints about her horrid life situation. Thus, that can be qualified as “escapism”, which is a method of self-expression, usually triggered by a traumatic event.<sup>65</sup> In Celie’s case, the long-lasting sexual molestation and abuse by her father, as well as her two previous pregnancies, appear to be the triggers for her need to “escape”. The letters she writes are not as much for communication as for summarising her silent thoughts and understanding her pain, given the fact that there is no one “concrete” she could confide to.<sup>66</sup>

Another interesting aspect to examine is that Celie does not sign the letters to a certain point in the novel. The first sign of an attempt at some signature can be noticed after the introduction of some of the first letters from Nettie, when Celie resigns from writing to God, as she states that “he” does not listen to her and is the same as every other man.

She ends the letter with a simple “Amen” instead of a signature. The fact that Celie does not sign her letters to a certain point may also stem from the probability that she herself did not feel worthy of signing her name at all. As the story progresses, Celie becomes an emancipated and strong woman, not reliant on any man, and it appears to be that at this point of the story, the actual signatures at the end of her letters can be seen.

Possibly the most substantial noticeable aspect of the form of writing is the language and dialect used to narrate the story. Celie uses the standard rural Georgia dialect.<sup>67</sup> However, some of her sentences may appear incomplete and grammatically incorrect. On the very first page of the book, there are words used like “titties” or “his thing” that no one would probably expect from a fourteen-year-old girl. That could be because she, compared to her sister, is not very educated and does not know any other expressions of the words she uses. On the other hand, when the perspective switches to Nettie, a whole other language and tone is uncovered. As a matter of fact, every

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<sup>65</sup> Majid Masad Hamdan and Kadhim Dahawi Abbas. “Letter – Writing as a Means of Escape in Alice Walker’s the Color Purple”. *International Journal of Social Science And Human Research* (2021): 270

<sup>66</sup> Hamdan and Abbas, “Letter – Writing as a Means of Escape in Alice Walker’s the Color Purple”, 271.

<sup>67</sup> Donnelly, “Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works”, 97.

character, predominantly female characters, has their tone and attitude regarding their language.<sup>68</sup>

From the stylistics perspective, as Zamruddin and Arafah state in their study, Walker incorporated the African American dialect as much as she could to demonstrate her own roots in the African culture. To include some exemplary words, as Zamruddin and Arafah suggest, "mammy" in place of "mommy," "naw" for "no," "git" for "get," "ast" for "ask," and "suh" for "sir," along with "nuff" as a variation of "enough."<sup>69</sup>

Another linguistic device incorporated into the story, according to Zamruddin and Arabah, is the usage of a double negative, which can be spotted mainly in some parts where, as was mentioned before, Celie resigned on addressing her letters to God. A prime example of this linguistic device is as follows: "I don't write to God no more, I write to you.", which means to point out the authenticity of Celie's language and her lack of education.<sup>70</sup>

Missing verbs are another aspect that Zamruddin and Arafah elaborated on. In parts such as, "She smart too though, I think." or "He your daddy.", the linking verb is clearly missing, referring yet again to the illiteracy of the characters who speak this way.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, Walker successfully emphasised the importance of African American roots projected onto the novel's language and made Celie's expression as authentic and raw as possible.

There is a frequent occurrence in the novel of addressing one particular male character, which is believed to be Celie's abusive husband, as Mr \_\_\_\_\_. However unclear it might seem as to why Walker purposely omitted this character's name, it has a logical explanation. According to Zamruddin and Arafah, Walker used this method for several purposes, one being that not only one man can be characterised as Mr \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>72</sup> It seems that the reader can project the character however they find fit. Not knowing the actual reference to Mr \_\_\_\_\_ also brings out the unique writing style and the reader's imagination.

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<sup>68</sup> Donnelly, "Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works", 97.

<sup>69</sup> Mardliya Pratiwi Zamruddin and Burhanuddin Arafah. "A Discourse Stylistics Analysis on the Regularities in Alice Walker's The Color Purple." *KnE Social Sciences* (2019): 10.

<sup>70</sup> Zamruddin, Arafah, "A Discourse Stylistics Analysis on the Regularities in Alice Walker's The Color Purple.", 11-12.

<sup>71</sup> Zamruddin, Arafah, "A Discourse Stylistics Analysis on the Regularities in Alice Walker's The Color Purple.", 13.

<sup>72</sup> Zamruddin, Arafah, "A Discourse Stylistics Analysis on the Regularities in Alice Walker's The Color Purple.", 13.

## Narrative Structure, Point of View, and Linguistic Devices

### 5.2 *Form and Narration in The Bluest Eye*

The narration of *The Bluest Eye* lies in the complexity of combining complementary aspects that Morrison incorporated into the novel. Furthermore, these aspects are what makes the novel truly stand out. The narration of the story is divided into two perspectives – an omniscient narrator and Claudia McTeer, that envelope throughout the story. Claudia’s perspective is a retrospective narration, meaning she is now a grown-up adult, reminiscing about past experiences.<sup>73</sup> The omniscient narrator focuses on the backstories of chosen characters. At the end of the novel, there is a dialogue between Pecola and someone who seems to be a creation of her imagination, symbolizing her complete madness and obsession with her blue eyes.

The first paragraph of the book is surprisingly not written by Morrison, as it seems to be an excerpt from a first-grade primer, *Dick and Jane*, written by William S. Gray, which was supposed to help little children learn to read with the support of pictures. The issue with the primer, as Werrlein suggests, is that it provides an unreal ideal of a picture-perfect white American family. The characters in the primer – Father, Mother, Dick and Jane are supposed to provide the child reader with the pre-constructed ideal of a white middle-class family.<sup>74</sup> Werrlein also suggests that the depiction of the Breedlove family is supposed to contrast with the “perfect” family of sibling Dick and Jane. That is why the run-on sentences can be found as chapter headings of some parts of the novel, partially depicting the upcoming narration. Due to this aspect, Morrison is indirectly criticising the white superiority and privilege.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, it is critical to acknowledge the progressing degeneration of the excerpt from the primer, as it suggests Pecola’s worsening mental state. At first, the excerpt is fully comprehensible and grammatically correct. In the next phase, the punctuation is missing entirely; there are no individual sentences, and therefore, the text seems incoherent. In the last phase, all the words are linked together, conveying no logical sense. As Al Mamun and Siddika claim, the three stages of the excerpt symbolise the three families. The first stage, the

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<sup>73</sup> Linnea Lindberg, "How Narrative Devices Convey the Theme of Love in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." (Ba., Karlstad University, 2015), 1.

<sup>74</sup> Debra T. Werrlein, "Not so Fast, Dick and Jane: Reimagining Childhood and Nation in the *Bluest Eye*." *MELUS* 30, no. 4 (2005): 56.

<sup>75</sup> Werrlein, "Not so Fast, Dick and Jane: Reimagining Childhood and Nation in the *Bluest Eye*.", 59.

most “civilised” one, represents the ideal of a white American family. The second stage, without punctuation and capital letters, symbolises the McTeer family – functional but not ideal. The third stage, which is linguistically in the worst state compared to the other stages, represents the Breedlove family – chaotic and incomprehensible.<sup>76</sup>

The next part of this chapter is going to analyse each of the excerpts from the Dick and Jane primer and elaborate on them. The first part of the excerpt occurs when the narration describes where the Breedloves live and provides a detailed depiction of their habitation. Therefore, the excerpt starts with “Here is the house.” and continues with a detailed description of the house’s appearance. Consequently, the house described in the excerpt is depicted as nicely looking and comfortable, whereas Breedlove’s family accommodation is depicted as ugly, run down and neglected.

HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWH  
ITEITHASAREDDOORITISVERYPRETT  
YITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTY<sup>77</sup>

The second part of the excerpt introduces the reader to the Breedlove family, elaborating on each member and highlighting their domestic issues. Starting with “Here is the family.”, the excerpt continues to introduce the family members in a relatively positive manner. The narration continues with an introduction of the Breedloves, indicating how dysfunctional the family actually is compared to the “happy” family from the excerpt.

HEREISTHEFAMILYMOTHERFATHER  
DICKANDJANETHEYLIVEINTHEGREE  
NANDWHITEHOUSETHEYAREVERYH<sup>78</sup>

The third part of the excerpt opens Geraldine’s backstory. This excerpt is focused explicitly on a cat, which is presumably considered by many to be a member of a family. In Geraldine’s backstory, it is discovered that although her attitude towards her husband and son is rather cold, she cannot deny her adoration for her blue-eyed black cat. The reader later finds out that the cat has been killed by Geraldine’s son, Louis Junior, and blamed it on Pecola.

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<sup>76</sup> Md. Abdullah Al Mamun, Sadia Siddika, "THE BLUEST EYE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES.", *Journal of Jessore University of Science and Technology* 5.1&2 (2020): 44.

<sup>77</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 31.

<sup>78</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 36.

SEETHECATITGOESMEOWMEOWCOM  
EANDPLAYCOMEPLAYWITHJANETHE  
KITTENWILLNOTPLAYPLAYPLAYPLA<sup>79</sup>

The fourth part of the excerpt might represent a mother-daughter relationship. As the excerpt suggests, in the Dick and Jane primer, the relationship between the mother and daughter is healthy and full of love and care. In contradiction, the relationship between Pecola and her mother is far from healthy or loving. Pauline thinks her daughter is ugly and does not believe her when she tells her about Cholly's sexual assault. The excerpt is followed by Pauline's backstory and gives the reader an insight into the shaping of Pauline's character.

SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICEMO  
THERWILLYOUPPLAYWITHJANEMOTH  
ERLAUGHSLAUGHMOTHERLAUGHLA<sup>80</sup>

The fifth part of the excerpt focuses on the father figure. The excerpt depicts the father of the family as "big and strong", possibly interpreted as the protector and provider of the family. However, as the narration continues with Cholly's backstory, the reader is provided with numerous traumatic experiences that Cholly went through as a young boy, including his father leaving and renouncing his son years later. Even when Cholly becomes a father, there is nothing protector-like about him and his duties towards his family.

SEEFATHERHEISBIGANDSTRONGFATH  
ERWILLYOUPPLAYWITHJANEFATHER  
ISSMILINGSMILEFATHERSMILESMILE<sup>81</sup>

The sixth excerpt refers to another animal – a dog. Similar to the cat, the dog is probably considered a part of the family, meaning that it would get the same care as the children. This excerpt is an introduction to another character's backstory – Soaphead Church. Morrison probably assigned this part of the primer to Soaphead's story, given that an animal figure in the form of a dog also occurs in his backstory. Soaphead's

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<sup>79</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 79.

<sup>80</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 108.

<sup>81</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 130.

hatred for his neighbour's old dog makes him manipulate Pecola to kill him so he would not have to do it by his own hand.

SEETHEDOGBOWWOWGOESTHEDOG  
DOYOUWANTTOPLAYDOYOUWANT  
TOPLAYWITHJANESEETHEDOGRUNR<sup>82</sup>

The last excerpt of the primer occurs at the very end of the novel. It serves as an introduction to a dialogue between Pecola and her imaginary friend after she goes insane from her blue eyes. The excerpt might regard the fact that everyone despised Pecola so much that she was left with no friends or family, forcing her to make up someone she could talk to and share her joy from her blue eyes.

LOOKLOOKHERECOMESAFRIENDTHE  
FRIEND WILLPLAYWITHJANETHEYWI  
LLPLAYAGOODGAMEPLAYJANEPLAY<sup>83</sup>

One may notice that the narrative is segmented into seasons – Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer. These seasons are supposed to simulate an actual periodical cycle of life and convey it through the changing events in the novel. Al Mamun and Siddika claim that the “Autumn” sections focus on introducing the two main families – Breedloves and McTeers. The “Winter” section is supposed to symbolize the hardships of being a black American through Claudia's childhood perspective. The “Spring” period is probably the most crucial, as it narrates the main events of the novel, such as Pecola's rape. It might refer to the spring season as the season where “everything blooms”, hinting at Pecola's pregnancy. The last “Summer” period serves as a conclusion and presents the consequences of previous events.<sup>84</sup>

The last narrative aspect to mention is the usage of backstories of several characters – Geraldine, Pauline Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove and Soaphead Church. Morrison uses the characters' past to approach the question of why the characters behave the way they do so the reader is able to gather at least some sympathy for them. First, the reader learns about Geraldine's backstory, focusing on her life as a privileged, shallow, light-skinned woman and discusses her longing to feel something. The

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<sup>82</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 162.

<sup>83</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 191.

<sup>84</sup> Al Mamun, Siddika, "THE BLUEST EYE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES.", 44-45.

backstory that follows is Pauline's. Her story describes her life with a physical disability and how she succumbed to the feeling of the impossibility of meeting the white standard of beauty. Cholly's backstory accomplishes to reflect on his past traumas, including his parent's abandonment and sexual trauma. His story is the most prominent to gain the reader's sympathy. The last backstory introduced is Soaphead Church's. His backstory also aims for the reader's compassion. However, in contrast with Cholly, it is more difficult to reason with someone who justifies his paedophilic tendencies by claiming that God would not have made the little girls so beautiful if it was forbidden to "love them".

### 5.3 *Comparison of Analysed Aspects*

The form of narration and additional literary devices are what make both novels so intriguing to read. Walker chose an epistolary form of narration for her novel, which perfectly fits the plot line and makes the novel interesting to read. On the other hand, Morrison chose two-perspective narration – retrospective narration through the eyes of one of the characters and an omniscient narrator. Another significant difference also lies in the choice of language. Meanwhile, Morrison did not incorporate any dialect or linguistic devices; Walker incorporated African American dialect to complement the protagonist's authenticity. However, Morrison introduced other elements, such as the *Dick and Jane* primer, representing the white standard of the happy family in comparison with the destructiveness of the black families or the segmentation of the story into seasons.

## Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to locate, analyse, discuss and compare different themes and aspects in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and subsequently lean on the primary and secondary sources to support the claims and finds. In the practical part, relevant terminology was used for a better understanding of the upcoming analytic part, which was subsequently used in the mentioned analysis. The reader was next introduced to a brief summary of the historical and cultural context both in real life and literary fiction, explicitly discussing The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its beginnings, explanation of lynching complemented by how the NAACP fought against it, pushing the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill in 1918 to pass, The Great Migration and its impact on the Southern culture and The Women's Suffrage Movement which depicted the uprising of women who fought bravely for their rights.

The practical part uncovered that even though in some parts of the novels, the reader can identify various themes, it is crucial to contemplate the greater meaning. The following chapter regards the identification of different forms of racism and a demonstration of specific excerpts from the primary sources. The comparison part concluded that the majority of the forms of racism could be found in *The Color Purple*; however, only the internalised racism predominantly occurred in *The Bluest Eye*. The next chapter discussed the importance of female empowerment, identifying the similarities and differences when dealing with traumatic events, analysing the behaviour of male characters and specifying the perception of beauty with the assistance of excerpts from the primary sources and occasional support of secondary sources. It is also discovered that even though both protagonists experienced the same form of abuse and its consequences, only one of them was able to overcome her feeling of "unworthiness" and find salvation. The last chapter regarding the form of narration concluded that both authors chose different unique narration styles. In Walker's case, the epistolary narration was supposed to help the protagonist overcome her trauma and show her the path to self-discovery. It also included a specific dialect to support the protagonist's nature. In Morrison's case, she chose a two-perspective narration to broaden the reader's perception of the story with the help of several literary devices, including the excerpt from the *Dick and Jane* primer and using it to demonstrate the differences between white and black families.

Considering that both Walker and Morrison are of African-American origin, it is clear that they both poured their heart into these beautifully executed novels. These women did not just write a story about “poor” black female characters; they also accomplished that even a white reader can understand the pain and suffering of those of colour who were exposed to decades of oppression and hatred and sympathise with the characters. They created powerful stories that were often met with misunderstanding and interpreted as “too explicit”. Indeed, it is challenging to read detailed descriptions of child molestation or racial injustice. However, that is precisely what makes these stories so moving and unique. Both *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* are undoubtedly a piece to remember.

‘One of the most haunting books you could ever wish to read... it is stunning – moving, exciting, and wonderful. ‘– Lenny Henry on *The Color Purple*<sup>85</sup>

‘Her legacy is total excellence..., she is magnificent, her emotional intelligence is second to none and her bravery was equal to her artistry. ‘– Kwame Kwei-Armah on *The Bluest Eye*<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Walker, *The Color Purple*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 2.

## Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce je identifikovat, vyobrazit, analyzovat a porovnat vybraná témata a problematiky nacházející se v dílech *Barva nachu* od Alice Walkerové a *Velmi modré oči* od Toni Morrisonové. Práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část, počínaje teoretickou částí. Veškeré úsudky a nálezy v této práci se opírají o primární a sekundární kritické zdroje.

Teoretická část čtenáře nejprve úzce seznamuje s použitými termíny jako „rasismus“ a „trauma“, se kterými bude v následujících kapitolách pracovat. Nadále zasazuje práci do historicky-kulturního kontextu, a to konkrétně do Spojených států amerických v první polovině dvacátého století. V této části se také pojednává o konkrétních historických událostech, které se v této době staly. Těmi jsou například formace Národní asociace pro podporu barevných (NAACP), která byla založena v roce 1909 kvůli přetrvávajícím projevům rasového násilí a diskriminace vůči Afroameričanům. Tento úryvek z historického kontextu je podložen událostí rasových nepokojů ve Springfieldu ve státě Illinois v roce 1908. Vzpouru, které se zúčastnilo více než 5 000 bílých obyvatel Springfieldu, podnítilo falešné obvinění dvou černochů, Joes Jamese a George Richardsona, ze znásilnění a vraždy. Dále následuje vyobrazení „Velké migrace“ a důsledky této události, které se podepsaly na jižní části Spojených států amerických. Velká migrace se vztahuje především na Afroameričany, kteří se v roce 1916 přesídlili z venkovského Jihu na průmyslový Sever a Západ za lepšími životními příležitostmi. Mimo jiné také informuje o hnutí sufražetek, jinými slovy, hnutí emancipovaných žen, které se nebály postavit se za svá práva. V analýze historicky-kulturního kontextu, tentokrát zaměřeným již na samotné romány, se pojednává o zasazení těchto románů a jejich dějové linky do již zmiňovaných období. V analýze historicky-kulturního kontextu k dílu *Barva nachu* jde o vyobrazení jižní kultury a přetrvávající dopady otroctví. V analýze historicky-kulturního kontextu k dílu *Velmi modré oko* se pojednává spíše o ekonomické krizi zvané „Velká hospodářská krize“ která měla velmi negativní dopad na ekonomickou situaci v rozpětí následujících deseti let a tyto dopady jsou patrné i v dějové lince. Velkou hospodářskou krizi lze charakterizovat jako největší hospodářský kolaps všech dob, který trval od roku 1929 do roku 1939.

Práce nadále pokračuje praktickou (analytickou) částí, která se dělí do tří kapitol podle tématu, který je v románu vyobrazený. První kapitola analyzuje výskyt rasismu a

předpojetí v obou románech. V této části se aplikuje definice a rozčlenění termínu „rasismus“, který byl definován v první teoretické kapitole a následně se s termínem pracuje za pomoci analýzy díla. Za pomoci rozčlenění termínu „rasismus“ dle typu – interpersonální, internalizovaný, institucionální a strukturální, lze na příkladech ve formě přímých citací z primární literatury demonstrovat, do jakého typu rasismu se konkrétní vyobrazená situace řadí. Tato kapitola se opírá hlavně o konkrétní situace a přímé odkazy z primární literatury a také o sekundární zdroje pro podepření některých tvrzení. Na konci kapitoly následuje srovnání analýzy z obou románů.

Druhá kapitola praktické části se zabývá primárně tím, jak hlavní postavy zpracovávají svá traumata a jaký vliv mají tyto traumata na jejich život a vyobrazení ženského ideálu krásy (a to především toho „bílého“), který je pro Afroamerické ženy potupnou, avšak nedílnou součástí jejich dospívání. Z analýzy vyplívá, že protagonistka v románů *Barva nachu* si s překonáním traumatu počínala daleko lépe nežli protagonistka z románu *Velmi modré oči*. Základním stavebním kamenem pro toto tvrzení spočívá v analýze rodin a prostředí obou hlavních postav. Zatím co Celie (*Barva nachu*) našla oporu ve své komunitě, na Pecolu (*Nejvíc modré oko*) její komunita zanevřela a díky tomu se z ní stal duševně nemocný jedinec, odepsaný vlastní komunitou.

Dále se kapitola zabývá vyobrazením ženských postav a klade důraz na jejich podobnosti i rozdíly, analýzou mužského chování a jejich pocitu lačnicím po moci a dominanci, objevování sexuality, a vnímání sexu jak u dospívajících mladých slečen, tak u dospělých jedinců. Tato kapitola se mimo jiné také zabývá tématem o hledání sama sebe skrze sexuální orientaci. Toto téma se objevuje pouze v jednom z románů (*Barva nachu*) a vyobrazuje vzkvétající vztah mezi dvěma ženskými postavami.

Tato kapitola se opět opírá hlavně o konkrétní situace a přímé odkazy z primární literatury, nýbrž také o sekundární zdroje pro podepření některých tvrzení. Na konci kapitoly následuje srovnání analyzovaných prvků z obou románů.

Třetí kapitola praktické části rozebírá styl vyprávění, který disponuje literárními prvky a prostředky. Pro vyprávění románu *Barva nachu* si Walkerová vybrala formu epistolárního románu neboli románu v dopisech. Celý příběh je tedy vyprávěn protagonistkou, která píše dopisy bohu, jelikož je to jediná forma „přiznání a důvěry“, na kterou má protagonistka nárok. V románu *Barva nachu* se také vyskytuje Afroamerický dialekt, který pomáhá čtenáři pochopit životní i mentální úroveň

protagonistky. Při analýze vyprávění a formy románu *Velmi modré oči* se kapitola věnuje stylu, který si Morrisonová vybrala pro vyprávění celého příběhu. Morrisonová se rozhodla zakomponovat do vyprávění příběhu dvě perspektivy – retrospektivní vyprávění očima jedné z hlavních postav a vševědoucího vypravěče. Dále následuje analýza použití výňatku z dětské učebnice *Dick a Jane*, který Morrisonová používá za účelem porovnání ideálu bílé americké rodiny s destruktivní rodinou tmavé pleti. Části tohoto výňatku jsou nerovnoměrně rozmístěny v celém románu a vždy odkazují na to, co v příběhu bude následovat. Dalším analyzovaným aspektem je rozhodnutí Morrisonové členit celý příběh do kapitol dle ročních období, které mají symbolizovat o čem kapitola pojednává. Jednotlivá roční období jsou v kapitole rozebrána a identifikována jejich interpretace. I tato kapitola čerpá především z primární literatury za pomoci sekundárních zdrojů. Stejně jako u předešlých praktických kapitolách, i v této se na konci práce zaměřuje na srovnání analyzovaných aspektů.

Na závěr lze říci, že obě autorky zcela autenticky ztvárnily veškerá témata, kterými se tato práce zabývá, a proto bylo možné tyto prvky bez problému identifikovat a analyzovat. Vzhledem k faktu, že Walkerová i Morrisonová spolu sdílí Afro-Americké kořeny, bylo z jejich děl patrné, že jejich záměrem bylo daleko více nežli pouze vyprávět příběh očima znevýhodněných černošských jedinců. Jejich odhodlanost ukázat veškeré vyobrazené problémy v naprosto autentické a upřímné formě a houževnatost vůči kritice lze považovat za jednu z nejvyšších kvalit, kterou může spisovatel mít. Ačkoli jsou tyto dva příběhy v mnoha vyobrazených aspektech podobné, každý z nich je naprosto jedinečný a unikátní.

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