

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER IN *THE BLUEST EYE*

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Abstract: The present work aims at finding relevant correspondences between Body Dysmorphic Disorder and the literary context of this novel’s main character, Pecola. The creation of such strong interdependence between a literary character and a psychological phenomenon represents a challenge on account of their apparently disparate natures but is nevertheless an enterprise capable of offering great literary and artistic satisfaction to both the reader and the author.

Keywords: abuse, Body Dysmorphic Disorder, racism, trauma

Introduction

The present paper approaches the continuous relationship between a psychological level and a literary one. It focuses on the combining of the two spheres and on the correspondences resulting from the blending of the two levels. It emphasizes the role of society as the constant perpetrator and the culprit for all the damage done in Pecola’s life. Society, represented by the actions of its individuals, is not only the mirror reflecting distorted images but also the death penalty for a victim already on death row. Society functions as the source of physical and psychological evil and, through the example of Pecola, represents the ultimate, destructive consequences of evil: “There are five major toxins in our society which contaminate our state of well-being ... prejudice, aggression, societal indoctrination, segregation and sex ... being promoters of those belief systems or being spectators and watching their negative consequences affecting the people around us...” (Liau 3).

Pecola, the main character in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, is the victim of a society where the supreme standard of beauty is considered to be whiteness. Not being white is, in Pecola's case, the pretext for her being bullied and subject to manifestations of racism. Pecola's existence is illustrative of the fact that the set of values called beauty generally implies prejudice and damage done to individuals; "Millions of people have a secret obsession. They're obsessed with how they look, with a perceived flaw in their appearance. They worry that their nose is too big, their breasts are too small, their skin is blemished, their hair is thinning ... any body part can be the focus of this obsession..." (Phillips 3).

The subjectivity of beauty, associated with the ruthlessness of racism, represents the poisoned cocktail for the black girl, the generator of BDD. The clinical manifestations of BDD find an accurate correspondence in the outworking of events in *The Bluest Eye*. The impact of the term "beauty" not only alters the way people think and interact but also produces disorders that shatter the inner psychological world of the individual. "...*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1983) defines self-esteem as 'belief in oneself; self-respect'...self-esteem has to do with value. If we hold something in esteem, we believe it has some value or worth..." (Claiborne Cherry 166).

BDD as Othering

Behind Pecola's existence stands a vicious monster which affects the lives of millions of people. The internal, psychological grinding of Pecola is reflected, from a figurative point of view, by psychogenic excoriation, a common manifestation of BDD. The skin lesions, the swelling, the blisters, the cuts, the burns and scars are a suggestive metaphor for the interior tragedy and metamorphosis of Pecola, who is gradually becoming a monster because of all the hate and prejudice reflected upon her. The process of causing damage, by mechanical or chemical means, is symbolic of the violent and caustic interior impact of the prejudice, hate and injustice of the society towards the sensitive psyche of teenage Pecola: "What exactly are the symptoms of BDD? Two major features make up BDD: the preoccupation with the defect and the actions people take to reduce their feelings of distress. The person with BDD spends a lot of time thinking about the defect and her worrying about how others will react or what they will think..." (Veale Neziroglu 12).

In Pecola's case the illness called BDD is in some way represented metaphorically by society itself, which embodies both the causes and the results of the illness reflected upon the individual. The BDD sufferer's thinking about the defect is, in Pecola's case, a metaphor for society's constant reminders of her ugliness, of its obsessive emphasis on the main character's so-called ugliness. "...How others will react and what they'll think..." represents, at a transcendent level, the self-consciousness and the insecurities of a society which constantly plants the seeds of doubt not only in Pecola's mind but also in the mind of any other individual who does not fit into that society's standards of beauty. As a consequence, the severity of BDD applies not to Pecola as a patient who suffers because of her ugliness but to society, which in itself represents a complex and severe case of BDD. Society is the severe generator and source of the illness but shifts the fault on to the victim rather than taking it upon itself. The society in which Pecola lives exacerbates the nonexistent or minimal defects in a person's appearance, just as BDD implies. In this lies the hypocrisy and injustice of the behaviour of society: instead of dealing with its own frustrations and problems, it projects them upon fragile and innocent lives:

Letting herself breathe easy now, Pecola covered her head with the quilt. The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution... "Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." ... Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs ... The face was hard, too ... Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. (Morrison 33)

The wish to disappear reflects Pecola's desire to annul her being, her existence as a human being. The gradual disappearance of her being reflects her immediate and powerful wish to become invisible, at a metaphorical level, to stop existing, to self-destruct. Her powerful desire to disappear represents, at an unconscious level, her innermost need to become someone else, to change into someone else, which is a common trait of the BDD patient. The impossibility of her eyes changing reflects her drama, the drama of the society in which she lives. The eyes are not only the means through which a person sees, but also embody a kaleidoscope of immutable experiences gathered in the cradle of the eye. At this point the eyes represent a paradox. They symbolize, from one perspective, the unchangeable and, from another perspective, the strong desire for change. "...Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear." The wish for

the eyes to disappear could represent an unbearable environment to be watched and to be dealt with and can also mean the drama of the unchangeable symbol of beauty. “‘Please, God,’ she whispered into the palm of her hand. ‘Please make me disappear’” represents Pecola’s recreation of the archetypal moment of guilt for Adam, who calls on God for help to make his suffering disappear. The guilt is unbearable and is equivalent to the immutable evil, to the implacable outcome that derives from pain:

There was the sidewalk crack shaped like a Y, and the other one that lifted the concrete up from the dirt floor ... The newly paved walks were bumpy and uncomfortable, and the sound of skate wheels on new walks was grating ... They were real to her. She knew them. They were the codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession. She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads, last fall, she had blown away.... (Morrison 35-36)

In an ironic way, the crack in the pavement and the dandelions represent the only moment of equilibrium in Pecola’s life. She has always depended on someone or something, or someone or something has made her dependent on them/it. In this way, a sense of fragility, of insecurity, has characterized her most of the time. The crack in the pavement is associated with the moment in which she truly feels alive. This made her feel she belonged to the world she lived in. The crack shaped like a Y, by the manner in which it is configured, can also symbolize a downfall, a pit or a funnel shape, representing the descending trajectory of the main character, Pecola. The crack can be the deceit of her destiny which makes her stumble repeatedly and is the premonition of bad things to come. Ironically, the crack in the pavement, despite giving Pecola a sense of stability, is the symbol of her cracked, fractured life, which follows her everywhere, no matter the efforts she makes to get rid of it:

A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove. Bay Boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, Junie Bug ... Heady with the smell of their own musk, thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harassed her. “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo ...”...That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth.... (Morrison 50)

The behaviour of the group of boys is a metaphor for the extreme psychological aggression and pressure that BDD sufferers experience at an emotional level. The violent language, the gang-like behaviour, the extreme intimidation were not turned against Pecola, one of their kind, but against themselves, against their inner insecurities, frustrations and hate. This is a self-destructive image of a group of boys who are unconsciously taking part in a ritual of self-destruction. The act of harassment represented the power of prejudice, hate and instinct against innocence and purity. It is the same power that consumes these boys from the inside, consuming not only their rational judgement but also their power to feel, appreciate, to discern right from wrong and, most importantly, to love. The last verb, “to love”, is a big puzzle for Pecola, who is a stranger to it, and she tries to understand the meaning of it, despite the fact that no one has been capable of manifesting it towards her:

...Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed. He making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence.... (Morrison 51)

The tragedy resides in the words *choking sounds* and *silence*. “The choking sounds” are a metaphor for the strange perception of the feeling in Pecola’s life, while “silence” is almost analogous to the emptiness, the void of significance she feels in relation to the word “love”. She can only grasp the feeling called love from the outside, through her hearing; she cannot grasp it from the inside, she cannot experience it appropriately, because she has never been given the occasion to feel it or to manifest it. In this way Pecola much resembles a BDD sufferer who is incapable of projecting love on the outside because he has never been able to fully experience love on the inside. The crack on which Pecola continuously stumbles is a piece of substitute love. The crack is the only form of mediation between the main character and the derivation of love symbolized by the dandelions and the fissure in the pavement. She feels that she is important because she belongs to the dandelions and the fissure and they both, in turn, belong to her. This relationship transforms itself in a form of protection exchange,

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve

her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people. (Morrison 35)

Pecola's constant prayer and hope to receive the longed-for eyes, blue ones, comes from a sense of weakness and lack of appreciation of her own beauty. The fact that Pecola's own standard of beauty means having blue eyes shows that this whole absurd ideal certainly comes from the equally ludicrous standard of beauty that is promoted by the society in which she lives. Psychogenic excoriation, characteristic of BDD sufferers, is analogous to Pecola's almost fanatical desire to have blue eyes, to become her dream actress, to become something that she will never be: the materialization of her inner ideal of beauty which is not something naturally belonging to her but is an ideal imposed by society. BDD patients spend most of their existence in search of an illusion, of the perfect lie that will put all their insecurities to rest:

Psychogenic excoriation is characterized by excessive scratching, picking, gouging, lancing, digging, rubbing or squeezing of normal skin or skin with minor surface irregularities ... Psychogenic excoriation causes significant distress and handicap and may lead to marked scarring, infections, and visible disfigurement. (Veale Neziroglu 84)

The eye is the most important sense in an individual's existence. Without it the person would not be able to live and survive normally in a society in which, although normality is represented by the act of seeing, this is only a performance intended to cover the actual blindness existing in the eyes of the individuals. In this context the eyes have a double meaning: from one point of view they are the promoters of opinion, establishing what beauty stands for and what ugliness means, and, from another point of view, they are, metaphorically speaking, the culprits for the blindness which forbids the individual to see beyond the narrow, superficial standard of beauty. The perspective of society on the idea of beauty is reinforced by the following quarrel between two girls, one defending Pecola and the other poking fun at her:

...What do I care about her old black daddy?" asked Maureen. "Black? Who you calling black?" "You!" "You think you so cute!" I swung at her and missed, hitting Pecola in the face. Furious at my clumsiness, I threw my notebook at her ... Safe on the other side, she screamed at us, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" She ran down the street, the green knee socks making her legs look like wild dandelion stems that had somehow lost their heads.... (Morrison 56)

The key sentence: “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I am cute!” represents the quintessence of the shallow, destructive *etalon* of beauty. It represents the death penalty for free will and for freely deciding what is beautiful and what is not. It stands for the incontestable slogan of a way of thinking and is part of a larger construction called indoctrination. This phenomenon also occurs in the case of BDD sufferers who, as in Pecola’s case, do not project their true, authentic feelings about themselves into the mirror in front of them, but the projection of what others have thought and projected onto them. Maureen’s running down the street is the flight from responsibility of every character who mistreats Pecola, of everyone who has harmed a BDD individual and felt no remorse when doing so. In this case the BDD sufferer is identified with Pecola who, as in her situation, is surrounded by people who induce in her a false reality, a surrogate reality of their own unfortunate lives. The BDD individual, like Pecola, cannot distinguish right from wrong because his mind, his thinking, is distorted by all the negativity and evil projected on to him:

...Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike ... She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say, “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!”... 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. (Morrison 34)

One can see here an accurate depiction of how beauty, represented by whiteness, was treated by society and how ugliness, represented by blackness, was perceived in the given situation. All the flattering behaviour shown to Maureen increases the gap between whiteness and blackness and is at the opposite pole from that directed at Pecola. All this negativity coming towards Pecola represents metaphorically the reason for glancing in the mirror of every BDD sufferer who looks in the mirror to see their so-called ugliness and does not understand whether it is true or false. By contrast with Pecola, the BDD sufferer does not question his ugliness, nor is he curious about it when he looks in the mirror; the BDD individual absolutely and fully despises his appearance and projects this as an implacable fact of his life. Pecola, on the other hand, while reflecting in the mirror for long hours, undergoes a process of self-understanding which is also a

damaging, destructive process because of the recollections it brings. By “...looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike...” Pecola tries to understand the ugliness manufactured and imposed on her by society while at the same time attempting to understand the justification for her mistreatment from the outside. In the case of Pecola her sense of ugliness is constantly fuelled by the society in which she lives; in the BDD patient’s case, every glance that they take in the mirror accentuates their feeling of ugliness and unworthiness in spite of the support provided by specialists: “Being *dissatisfied* with one’s appearance is normal, but BDD is different. Someone with BDD is *preoccupied* with their appearance, is excessively self-conscious, and experiences marked distress and handicap...” (Veale, Neziroglu IX).

Pecola’s constant desire to have blue eyes and her admiration for a white child star masks a deep preoccupation with her appearance. She constantly faces the white-black duality in the contexts of life, and this implicitly and inevitably creates an excess of self-consciousness. This is a consequence of the collision between the exterior world and her appearance, and it is this that creates her inner pain and anger. Her perpetual wish for blue eyes is suggestive of “marked distress and handicap...”. It is the result of a chain reaction in which her strong desire masks an inner wish to switch races, to become a member of a different race.

Most clients with BDD acknowledge that they are not *disfigured*, but believe themselves to be ugly or very unattractive. Some clients may be preoccupied not with “a defect,” but with one or more features being not perfect, not “right” or not equal. They might accept that they look “normal” to others but are preoccupied by self-disgust. A variation on this is a hatred of one’s own race and a desire to pass as a different race. (Veale Neziroglu 8)

Pecola believes herself to be ugly or unattractive as long as society believes this and consequently determines her to believe in the same way. She had not considered herself to be ugly before society passed this clear judgment on her. Her ugliness is in a direct proportion to the ugliness promoted by her society. She knows the meaning of beauty as far as society lets her know what it means. She knows that beauty is whiteness and, consequently, this is the form of beauty she wants to achieve: “The internal body image and external objective attributes of appearance are thus completely different constructs. This is counterintuitive to most people’s

experience and is probably a contributory factor to the stigma experienced by people with BDD...” (Veale Neziroglu 56).

Pecola’s internal body image is different from her external one because society has distorted the former to such an extent that it has made her hate herself and implicitly her own race too and has determined her to want to become someone else. Society has produced in her being a yawning gap between her appearance and her internal body image. That is why Pecola, like any BDD sufferer, carries a stigma which is a constant reminder of the conflict between her internal body perception and the “external objective attributes of appearance”: “Individuals with BDD define their self almost exclusively through an *idealized value* about the importance of their appearance...” (Veale Neziroglu 56).

This *idealized value* comes from the outside world, which transforms it into a standard of beauty. In the world that Pecola lives in the *importance of appearance* is connected to the idea of beauty symbolized by actresses such as Shirley Temple. Appearance is important in the social context as long as it is associated with *whiteness*: “The cornerstone of the diagnosis of BDD is *preoccupation* with an imagined or minor defect in appearance...” (Veale Neziroglu 6).

The preoccupation of the BDD sufferer with “an imagined or minor defect in appearance...” is the result of people’s fanatical search for beauty, for perfection. This creates tension among individuals who are no longer governed by healthy, solid principles but by superficial, ephemeral ones. Pecola’s *preoccupation* is connected to her eyes, more exactly to changing them. Her eyes represent a *defect* only in her view and cannot be considered a defect in the true meaning of the word. The so-called *defect* in appearance, represented by her eyes, is a continuation of a broader one, propagated by the community, called “ugliness”,

Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness ... was behavior, the rest of the family—Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove--wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them ... You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.”.... (Morrison 28)

In the case of Pecola and in the case of her entire family the word “ugliness” is associated with the term “conviction” and they are the manifestation of the sentence “You are

ugly people” imposed on them and not coming from them. Their so-called “conviction” is a metaphor for society’s indoctrination and pollution of their minds, while “...You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source...” represents the voice of reason, the inner voice of the characters who “...wore their ugliness...although it did not belong to them”. Their ugliness is, in fact, a social construct, a hypnotic process which keeps them under control. It is a form of brainwashing that comes from a master who is interested in not being contradicted in any way. They have not been given free will to judge whether they are beautiful or not; everything has been imposed upon them. This is why Pecola’s glance into the mirror reflects the first audacious attempt of a black mind to question and understand “ugliness”. The condition in which Pecola’s family finds itself is analogous to the condition of BDD sufferers. In both cases, the sense of ugliness comes from a supreme, undeniable touchstone of judgement called society and not from an inner, conscious sense of ugliness. The BDD sufferer has to bear the burden of ugliness which comes not from a well-founded belief but as a result of unconditional obedience to the order of the master “You are ugly”. Instead of resisting the mirror which states “You are ugly”, the BDD sufferer becomes more and more confused and states “You are right” when in fact they should have asserted “You are wrong”. In this way it all comes down to a person’s distorted internal image: about themselves, and about their importance to the exterior, the forever-judging society.

A relevant example for the statement “You are ugly” is shown in the following paragraph, in which Pecola goes to a grocer’s store for some candy and ends up adding another unfortunate event to her insecurities and unhappiness:

...She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition--the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended ... But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes ... She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness ... She holds the money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand...Outside, Pecola feels the inexplicable shame ebb. (Morrison 36-37)

The distaste and the coldness that she creates in the grocer are evident when she wants to buy some candy from his store. Again the conflict is relevant in the collision of the two worlds, the white one and the black one. This meeting of the two sides is another testimony to prejudice,

lack of appreciation for the human being, and racial blindness. Every gesture that the grocer makes turns into a threat of prejudice, which is not manifested violently or openly but leaves him as almost the silent, introverted hater, who becomes even more dangerous in his discreet but insidious way of manifesting his distaste towards blackness. “The total absence of human recognition”, “the glazed separateness”, “the distaste” are assimilated by little Pecola and transformed into guilt, shame and pain. The vicious circle represented by the judger-judged relationship is also present in the case of BDD sufferers, where negative, traumatic events trigger the illness called Body Dysmorphic Disorder. All the other traumatic events that add up to these experiences fuel and magnify the negative consequences that derive from the illness. Pecola is, from this point of view, a BDD subject, permanently carrying with her an interior mirror that constantly reflects a distorted, evil, manufactured image about herself that comes from the society that this mirror embodies. The words “...disgust, even anger in grown male eyes...”, “distaste”, “...not wanting to touch her hand...” are, in fact, a metaphor reflecting the BDD patient’s interior pain and reflecting the vicious circle of destruction that humiliation creates.

It is interesting how the human beings have always defined themselves through the image of the other and how the other becomes a sort of deity in the destiny and the evolution of the receiver, represented in this case by Pecola. Anger is salutary for Pecola, who feels in anger the sense of belonging to someone, or something:

...Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging. Her thoughts fall back to Mr. Yacobowski's eyes, his phlegmy voice. The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. Its thirst too quickly quenched, it sleeps. The shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes. What to do before the tears come. She remembers the Mary Janes. (Morrison 37-38)

Anger gives her the never-before-encountered experience of feeling like a normal human being. But, unfortunately, when the anger disappears, Pecola is thrown back into the same feelings of shame and pain to which she is so very well accustomed: “The shame wells up again....What to do before the tears come...”,

White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers ... 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 ... 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. Junior used to long to play with the black boys.... (Morrison 67-68)

The prejudice and the pain that Pecola faces are the result of the situation depicted above: a certain kind of racism in which coloured people turn against their own kind, other non-white people, thus succeeding in formulating their way of thinking into a simple sentence: "Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud". The extent of this amazing hatred in black society is amazing if one considers the efforts that Junior's mother makes in order to keep her child "neat and quiet". These efforts are not only meant to communicate an exterior message of abjuring one's black roots but are also intended to strengthen the subtle and telltale signs of "the line between colored and nigger". In order for the repudiation to be successful, Junior: "...came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P.L was good enough for him..." (Morrison 75). The denial of their own kind did not manifest itself only at an exterior, physical level but also came to be reflected at a psychological level. The seeds of prejudice and hate insinuate themselves into a child who, through his actions, tries his best to disperse them into the world outside. For his family blackness does not represent only a threat that may link them to the idea of blackness but is more of a plague, something to be dreaded and fled from. The actual manifestation of the seeds of prejudice and cruelty is evident in the following lines:

On a day when he had been especially idle, he saw a very black girl taking a shortcut through the playground. She kept her head down as she walked...Nobody ever played with her. Probably, he thought, because she was ugly. Now Junior called to her...I got something to show you ... "Show me what?" "Some kittens...Here!" Pecola turned. "Here is your kitten!" he screeched. And he threw a big black cat right in her face. (Morrison 70)

Junior's approach to Pecola is the continuation of the seeds of racism promoted in his family. The way Junior lures Pecola into his house is analogous to the lie and the hypocrisy that Junior's mother promotes when she wants to keep her boy white not only externally but also on the inside. Both situations have in common the same belief in deceit. The trap that Junior prepares for Pecola is the same as the trap that the negative effects of racism spring on people. The black cat thrown in Pecola's face is a metaphor for the racism of the coloured towards their own roots: black ones. The gasping high-pitched laughter of Junior is representative of the cruel,

sadistic laughter of racism which drives people to act foolishly and irrationally. Racism dominates the society in which Pecola lives and is an imported element in the reflection of the mirror called society upon Pecola's existence. Racism is the caustic, violent light that can be reflected out of a mirror which, having a dispersive function, is of utmost importance in the Pecola-society relationship. The Pecola-society image recreates the classic image of the BDD patient in front of a mirror, which reflects not the reality of the patient but a previously constructed reality induced by a cruel society. Pecola, like the BDD patient, stands for the victim of a society which is too consumed with promoting its own absurd beliefs and too cruel to have thought of the consequences when promoting them:

Up over the hump of the cat's back she looked. "Get out," she said, her voice quiet. "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house."... Pecola backed out of the room, staring at the pretty milk-brown lady ... The pretty lady's words made the cat fur move; the breath of each word parted the fur ... Outside, the March wind blew into the rip in her dress. She held her head down against the cold. But she could not hold it low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement.... (Morrison 72)

The adjective "pretty" associated with milk-brown is not accidental. Pecola is black and, as a consequence, she is ugly; Junior's mother is milk-brown and, as a result, she is pretty. The connotations of black or milk-brown represent the ultimate form of hypocrisy derived from discrimination. The cold weather outside is synonymous with the cold with which the world greets Pecola every time it has the chance to. The snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement are the symbol of the shower of discrimination and accusing words that always seems to rain down on her. But as the snowflakes die on the pavement, so does the meaning of the rough words addressed to Pecola:

In BDD, the beliefs (or negative thoughts) and evaluations are based on appraisals of one's appearance....An individual with BDD might experience a mental image viewed from an observer perspective of how he appears to others and *believe* that his skin is scarred and wrinkled. He might then evaluate his appearance as being as awful and ugly as the Elephant Man.... (Veale Neziroglu 65)

Pecola, like any normal human being, is intricately linked to society's beliefs about and evaluations of her own appearance, and the resulting feedback has induced in her a feeling of ugliness. The outside world has constantly reflected on to her a negativity which is greatly

increased by her blackness. Pecola not only experiences a mental image of her appearance as viewed from an observer's perspective, but she also constantly experiences the cruel remarks of others. The same "other" in the case of the BDD sufferer is not only the destructive force that triggers the illness but is also the salutary force which, in Pecola's case, does not exist. In spite of other people's cruelty, Pecola still has doubts about their way of judging her appearance. The moment comes when she looks in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of her ugliness, and, as every BDD sufferer does, discovers the element which makes her look ugly: in her case, her eyes. This preoccupation with changing just one part of her body, which is, in her opinion, the reason why people consider her ugly, is synonymous with the obsession that the BDD sufferer has about one particular body part, which they consider responsible for their supposed ugliness, "People with BDD often experience either ideas or delusions of self-reference depending on severity and degree of insight. Typically, clients believe that others are taking special notice of their defect..." (Veale, Neziroglu 65).

The belief of BDD sufferers that others are taking special notice of their defect is, in Pecola's case, a reality. She does not imagine that people are taking special notice of her defects, but that people truly function as the unbreakable, omniscient mirror reflecting a distorted image of herself, an image that conveys ugliness only as a consequence of society's own distorted beliefs about beauty:

...Body shame is a multifaceted experience with various components ... a) A social or external evaluative component. The effect of shame elicited in social contexts is associated with thoughts about being inferior, defective, ugly ... This is referred to as external shame. b) An internal self-evaluative component. This is the internal critic and global self-evaluation as being inferior, defective, ugly, or bad.... (Veale Neziroglu 77-78)

The external shame in the case of the BDD sufferer is in Pecola's case an equivalent, a symbol for the emotional pressure that society has exercised upon her, pressure that came not from an objective point of view but from a harsh, subjective one. The internal shame of the BDD patient is, in Pecola's situation, synonymous with the idea of ugliness associated with her entire family. It is the ugliness which comes in the form of a burden from the Lord and becomes a certain kind of duty for Pecola's family. It is an ugliness which does not necessarily involve an exterior correspondent but rather a psychological obedience that corresponds with the master's

wishes. "...It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question..." (Morrison 28). As a result, the interior psychological pressure of the BDD sufferer is, in Pecola's case, more an external psychological pressure coming from a judge whose verdict cannot be contested.

There is a special relationship with the mirror where Pecola and the BDD sufferer are concerned. In both cases it is the destructive element because it is the intermediary between the individual and his distorted image of himself:

BDD patients also spontaneously reported that they were more likely to use the mirror if they were feeling depressed. Overall, BDD patients retained some insight into their behavior. They were more likely than controls to agree with the statements: "Looking in a mirror so often and for so long distorts my judgement about how attractive I am" and "Every mirror I look in I see a different image".... (Veale Neziroglu 79)

In Pecola's situation, society shows a very different image of her in every context of life. "...Every mirror I look in I see a different image..." is suggestive of the multitude of reflections that the mirror called society projects on to the main character. This multiplicity of images is, in the case of BDD, a construct of the patient's imagination, which creates pathology derived from the patient's early negative experiences. In Pecola's situation, this multiplicity of images is the multitude of negative, traumatic experiences that Pecola constantly faces. "...Looking in a mirror so often and for so long distorts my judgement about how attractive I am..." translates into the prison and the torture chamber that society is for the black girl. She does not know who she really is or what her true identity is because her identity is a multiple one and depends on the whims of society. She is a puppet who is dressed in different clothes each day according to the needs and wishes of the puppeteer. Pecola and the BDD patient represent, through these various images, society's need to externalise its frustrations and anxieties.

Conclusion

The quest for perfection has become a worldwide phenomenon and people have voluntarily participated in it and in their self-destruction. Not only have they destroyed themselves, but they have also destroyed other people through perpetually looking for and idolizing perfection. People nowadays are developing inner insecurities and anxieties concerning their looks, because standardized beauty is an absurd model. It is no wonder that some of them

perceive their hair as thinning and their skin as becoming blemished if they are constantly bombarded with images of bodily perfection. This creates an inferiority complex which affects the individual from multiple points of view, and the main culprit is not their exterior flaws but a more perverse one: the ever-changing collective standard of beauty.

The situations portrayed in the novel and their algorithm resemble Dante's *Inferno*. Every perspective of the novel is realized through the lens of the characters' actions, which recreate the racist-centred movement in endless dramatic instances. The delirious perpetual movement of the novel's plot is relevant in the tragic situations which the main character has to face. The circular movement does not have an upward direction but a downward, destructive one. The movement is hypnotic and unstoppable because it affects almost all the characters in the novel, who become the inevitable tools of destruction for Pecola. The narrative instances in *The Bluest Eye* recreate the line of a circle, which swirls endlessly, as if eternally.

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