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MORRISON'S BLUE-EYED GOLEM: A REENACTMENT OF THE THIRD MAN ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT. This article deals with Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, as a possible interweaving of Aristotle's Third Man Argument into both societal and psychological aspects of the contemporary world. Rooted in this philosophical background, it follows the decline of Pecola Breedlove's mental stability throughout three segments that mimic the argument's structure. The degradation of archetypes and the character's conception of beauty articulate our thesis as it attempts to present the novel as a reenactment of the philosophical theory resorting to Borges' poem "El golem" to strengthen the connection between Morrison's take on Afro-American realities and Aristotle's position regarding the degradation of the ideal.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, Philosophy, The Bluest Eye, Third Man Argument, Golem, Borges.

REPRESENTACIÓN DEL ARGUMENTO DEL TERCER HOMBRE EN *OJOS AZULES* DE TONI MORRISON

RESUMEN. Este artículo trata la primera novela de Toni Morrison, *Ojos azules*, como un posible entramado del argumento del tercer hombre de Aristóteles dentro de aspectos sociales y psicológicos del mundo contemporáneo. Enraizado en este plano filosófico, sigue el declive de la estabilidad mental de Pecola Breedlove a lo largo de tres segmentos con el propósito de imitar la estructura del argumento. La degradación de los arquetipos y la concepción de la belleza de los personajes articulan nuestra tesis para intentar, desde allí, presentar la novela como una representación de la teoría filosófica de Aristóteles recurriendo al poema de Borges "El golem" para reforzar la conexión entre el retrato esbozado por Morrison de las realidades afroamericanas y la teoría aristotélica de la degradación de los arquetipos.

Palabras clave: Toni Morrison, Filosofía, Ojos azules, Argumento del tercer hombre, Golem, Borges.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1970, Toni Morrison published her opera prima: *The Bluest Eye*. Nowadays a crucial novel for feminism and the fight against racism, it explores Claudia MacTeer's girlhood while she narrates the story of another young black girl living in Ohio: Pecola Breedlove. Her experiences, enlightened by the author's critical approach, allow *The Bluest Eye* to confirm that Morrison "is here to speak of 'all those peripheral little girls' who otherwise remain invisible" (Roye 212).

The plot begins with the announcement that Pecola was raped by her own father and the baby they conceived was stillborn. Yet, the novel works within an altered timeline which starts when Pecola is forced to move to the MacTeer household because her father tried to burn to ashes the house they were living in. She is seen as a disruptive force by the two daughters of the family, yet, when she suddenly gets her period, she becomes an asset to them. She has something they do not, something that would give them an opportunity to be noticed. A need that Pecola wants to fulfill through the transformation of her brown eyes into blue ones, a miracle that would solve the extreme invisibility she has grown into while granting her heavenly beauty.

Claudia's point of view introduces the reader to the society the author is trying to portray. According to Jane Kuenz, this choice allows Morrison to "represent black female subjectivity as a layered, shifting, and complex reality" (421). The novel is a mosaic of images captured by a child who tries to piece together the inner struggles and pain Pecola is going through, while figuring out the truths she wants to believe in as a maturing individual.

Love and sexual harassment are primary subjects to Morrison's prism, Pecola's experiences and breaking points are shaped around times where violence is misunderstood and mistaken for a confession of love. Both children and mature characters are constructed around their understanding of what it means to demonstrate affection: the reader will often witness different types of sexual aggression, some subtle and cruelly hidden between lines, others placed right in front of the eyes of the spectator as if they were looking for someone to take action. Pecola will often think that being aggressive towards someone is loving them because that is how her parents behave towards each other while supposedly being in love.

Anissa Janine Wardi, in her 2005 article "A Laying on of Hands: Toni Morrison and the Materiality of 'Love'," reflects on several of Morrison's works but there is something special that she notices in *The Bluest Eye* which, she says, "concludes with a treatise on love" (201):

> Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye. (Morrison 204)

Analyzing this fragment, Wardi clarifies: "The power, then rests with the lover, who is active, choosing the expression of love. The beloved are static, incapacitated if not immobilized, by the love itself" (202). And while this can be true in certain situations within the novel, throughout this investigation we will argue against the idea of the active lover as they too are sometimes motionless. The only fluid thing is the stream of ingrained violence that is reproduced until there is no room for anything or anyone else to grow. Morrison constructs a story to guide the reader into thinking critically about the oppression enforced towards sexuality, gender and race; she shows, instead of telling, that truth can be in the eye of the beholder. In discussing racism within the novel it can be useful to rely on W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he defines race as: "a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life" (181). He answers questions surrounding the status that comes with being of one race or another; can he be both an American and a Negro? Du Bois explains the prejudice against the black community in a straightforward and politically committed way, addressing his own. Following in his steps, Morrison tries to bring to life the reality Du Bois describes, groundwork that would later lead to a direct reference of his work in her novel *Paradise*. She writes about prejudices that come from within because they have soaked through from racism and predominant white ideals: in *Paradise*, she illustrates the nuances of colorism, she re-focuses the lens, as in each of her novels, to understand in depth what has shaped her life as a black woman. She enables her characters to create a promised land where black people are free

but only to show that such thing is not possible; she succeeds in making her characters fail. The same happens in *The Bluest Eye*, yet, instead of an apparently healthy and paradisiacal environment, the reader finds that black girls are driven mad by the standards they are meant to follow. What is common within race brings unity in Du Bois' argument, whereas in *The Bluest Eye* it is a weapon used to tear each other apart. The criticism of a disjoint and barren society has also been commented on in "Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* As a Prose Version of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*" where a strong connection between Morrison's work and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is suggested (Al Kayed and Al Kayid 109).

As Claudia MacTeer walks us through Pecola's childhood, the reader understands that she represents the broken pieces of a hurting community. The beauty in the novel lies, mostly, in the journey the girls go through to find their "vision of truth," the place where they are meant to fit in or, in Pecola's case, the place where she will have to end up hiding. Their perception of the world is defined by their understanding of individual beauty. Morrison reaches for something bell hooks addresses in *Yearning Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*: "When this diversity is ignored, it is easy to see black folks as falling into two categories: nationalist or assimilationist, black-identified or white-identified" (29). This behavior, hooks explains, tackles why and how Pecola is slowly crushed by beauty standards and by what society expects of her. Morrison elaborates in the novel's afterword: "Holding the despising glance while sabotaging it was difficult. The novel tried to hit the raw nerve of racial self-contempt, expose it, then soothe it not with narcotics but with language that replicated the agency I discovered in my first experience of beauty" (Morrison 207). Double standards and self-awareness will be the detonators of Pecola's madness. Even though she has been raped and has suffered sustained abuse, she is expected to behave like a scarless child: within this community, everyone must fulfill his or her assigned role. Yet, when Pecola does, she is still not met with love or acceptance, which results in her desire to become someone else, maybe Shirley Temple, maybe Mary Jane. She wishes for impossible transformations and is doomed to become a misfit.

Authors like Alex Zamalin and Richard L. Schur write about the fact that Morrison never advocated for the policies that black people were trying to install when she wrote her novels. What she was actually doing, as she reveals in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), essays which Schur comments on in his article, was trying not to romanticize blackness but to, sometimes, demonize it to go further than what laws and amendments could express (288-289). She had to find her own approach to the policies embodied in literature because:

> When Morrison began to write in the early to mid sixties, relatively little scholarship addressed African American culture or other historically marginalized peoples and cultures. Hence the opening words to her first novel are 'Quiet as it's kept' (Bluest Eye 9; Paradise 196). In her early novels Morrison gives voice to those people whose thoughts, feelings, and emotional lives had been elided in the writing of American history. (285)

The Bluest Eye also engages with the political discourse of feminism as Ágnes Surányi, Nancy K. Cardona and Sam Vásquez have argued. Morrison represents girlhood as a period especially challenged by one's lack of protection against external criticism, beauty culture carves its way into each of her characters and takes on different costumes. In her article, Cardona quotes Naomi Wolf and highlights that the beauty myth "is an imposed system that is designed to maintain male dominance" (13), yet she finds it necessary to clarify:

> The beauty myth does affect all women. What Wolf fails to take into account is whether or not the beauty myth affects all women equally. The question that is raised is this: If a society upholds a standard that is, by its nature, exclusive what effects are rendered on those who are excluded? (13)

This is one of the core motifs of the novel. Morrison will answer Cardona's question, especially, through Pauline Breedlove's experiences.

Maintaining the sensation that the reader is living through the children's eyes, Morrison chooses fragments of the popular children's book series *Dick and Jane* to explore the philosophical concept of degradation through texts that would have influenced the girls' upbringing. Thomas H. Fick comments on this choice while focusing on the traces he finds of Plato's Allegory of the Cave in the novel, arguing that this Platonic argument is clearly represented in the fragments where cinema appears inside the texts. He says that Pecola, in her desire for blue eyes, wants to "reform the world by reforming the way she sees it, a transcendental rather than existential imperative" (11). In the different realities of the novel, characters like Pauline deal with reality through fiction but, for the reader to understand the nuances of these techniques of escapism, we think it fundamental to understand the possible purpose of referencing *Dick and Jane*:

> The 'Dick and Jane' primer is important not only because it provides a particular set of expectations of modes of behavior […] but because it locates these expectations and behaviors in a realm of immutable Archetypes – equivalent to the Platonic idea of the 'real' – in contrast with which this transient world is only an imitation. Compared to the world of green and white houses, strong, smiling fathers and happy mothers, Claudia's and Pecola's world is but an 'Imitation of Life', to cite the title of a movie that one character admires extravagantly.
>
> The novel centers on one successful and several unsuccessful efforts to move beyond Platonic 'realism' towards an understanding and acceptance of the physical world's primacy. (Fick 13)

Fick's statements point in the right direction yet, when reading the novel, the Allegory of the Cave seems to fall short when trying to demonstrate some of the ideas that Morrison has sewn into her story. We believe that Morrison not only explores the possible interpretations of Platonic idealism but adjusts them to the posterior theory of the Third Man Argument. Aristotle's objection to Plato's theory takes us down more interesting paths that might help us understand the novel at a deeper level; Morrison's aim does not seem to be that of accepting the physical

world's primacy or even entering the game of realities but exposing the fact that all of them are mutable. There is no physical world to hold on to because there is no perfect archetype to look up to, instead, *The Bluest Eye* becomes a staging in three different levels of the Third Man Argument. Morrison plays with the narration, with the typography[1] she uses, and the meaning adhered to its changing, Fick's approach is appropriate, but he soon becomes more interested in the portrayal of cinema and vision. Instead, what we want to demonstrate is how, in Morrison's novel, the improbable Platonic reality comes to life aided by Aristotle's objection; it is a *mise en scene* of this philosophical theory at all levels.

According to the initial theory of Platonic archetypes, the world is an imperfect copy of the ideal. Yet, victim to the structure of the "copy of the copy of the copy," one can discern that his argument would demonstrate that further copies of the ideal would be more imperfect than the previous one leading to a constant degradation allowing two possible conclusions, either the archetype does not exist or the object is so degraded that it would become unrecognizable rendering the ideal irrelevant.

This argument, although originally posed in one of Plato's later works, owes its proliferation and development to Aristotle. In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell explains this theory as follows: "The strongest argument is that of the 'third man': if a man is a man because he resembles the ideal man, there must be a still more ideal man to whom both ordinary men and the ideal man are similar" (249); a clear objection to the immutability of the soul, of ideas and of the realities they might produce. Hence the possibility of an *ad infinitum* chain of imperfections where copies evince the degradation. When placing it in an infinite regression, Aristotle demonstrates the lack of necessity for archetypes as they would either be inexistent or exist in such a way that the object would be so distant that its reference could no longer be recognized, preventing the relation of resemblance that would be needed for the archetype to affect man or his knowledge of the world.

The purpose of this article is to discuss a different interpretation of Morrison's work. The structure of the novel appears to support the presence of the Third Man Argument throughout Pecola's story. *The Bluest Eye* is a reenactment of this philosophical theory, an attempt at explaining how it would work in the contemporary world not only in terms of society in general but also in the individual's psyche. Fick investigates the writer's take on what is real and what is an imitation, yet we believe Morrison went further than that and reflected on the world's status beyond reality or fiction, concentrating on Aristotle's degradation of archetypes.

[1] "This recalls the famous artistic distinction between figure and ground. When a figure or 'positive space' (e.g., a human form, or a letter, or a still life is drawn inside a frame) an unavoidable consequence is that its complementary shape - also called the 'ground', or 'background', or 'negative space'- has also been drawn. In most drawings, however, this figure-ground relationship plays little role. The artist is much less interested in ground than in the figure. But sometimes, an artist will take interest in ground as well" (Hofstadter 75).

PLAY, JANE, PLAY: A PHILOSOPHICAL STAGING

Morrison's novel begins by building a sense of something being wrong. Silence and marigolds combined with melancholy and harassment. Implicit questions about the fertility of the soil around their house foreshadow the destiny of the children; from the beginning, an uncomfortable scene is staged so the story can be understood from its intended angle. *The Bluest Eye* begins by announcing the author's intentions in its own title. Morrison does not use technical terms to hinder the reader's comprehension; she recurs to strong images instead. She wants to make us comprehend which elements are being used for the recreation of this fictional reality so we can follow the process. Instead of describing something she has invented, something she has not felt, she breaks down something so obvious that it is often ignored or taken for granted. It is not about degradation in itself but about the conviction that such degradation exists, presenting it not as an objection to the Platonic theory but as a confirmation of such perception. In order to achieve this, she begins to build her stage with a shining title and the structure of the children's books series *Dick and Jane*.

At first glance, the name of the novel seems to have an obvious meaning: a physical meaning, a superlative one. With the *est* following the word *blue*, one might think of something good, something essentially absolute. Yet, "The Bluest Eye" could also be interpreted phonetically and, in that case, it could be read as "The Bluest I", (blue, related to sadness and melancholy): "The saddest version of me." "The bluest I" would be the one that has been driven to the furthest of ends, a superlative that was meant to be good but ended in ruins: the degradation of an archetype, perhaps.

Before *Autumn* begins, the life of Dick and Jane is described to us in a set of degenerating paragraphs about a white family living in the suburbs. Mother, Father, Dick, Jane, cat and dog, all part of this pedagogical tale. They live in a wonderful house with a beautiful front yard where they can play without a worry. This passage, as noted by Phyllis R. Klotman in her article "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye,*" serves several purposes, working "as a synopsis of the tale that is to follow, and as a subtly ironic comment on a society which educates – and unconscionably socializes – its young with callous disregard for the cultural richness and diversity of its people" (123). Everything Dick and Jane have Pecola either lacks or has received in a corrupted way. Morrison inserts this children's tale in a clear first paragraph and makes it more unintelligible progressively. Slowly, the reader is separated from the original story and confronted with a mass of letters. Without the original fragment this disarray of symbols could easily be overlooked, and the text would have no meaning. It is through form (ground and figure), through typography–which demonstrates the degradation of an ideal and educational story–that Morrison will be able to take the reader on a journey of awareness. As Linda Dittmar points out in her article: "Morrison's 'Dick and Jane' typography belies the text's claim to transparency, as do her leaps in chronology, in location, and in narrating viewpoints and modalities. All these devices insist on the reader's self-conscious participation in the reconstitution of the text" (143).

This three-paragraph degradation is the perfect example to introduce the presence of the Third Man Argument, from the archetype to what appears to be its most degraded descendant: an illusion that hides that there will always be one prior version and one latter. Unfortunately, Pecola is not aware of the pattern of the archetype, she only recognizes its degradations. She has been convinced that Dick and Jane are the ideal *people,* however, white people are themselves a degradation of *people*, one of the many variations of the archetype. Because white people are considered superior socially, the characters in the novel will believe themselves a degradation of the degradation and so on, an *ad infinitum* regression revealing the inner structure of the exclusion, of the "dirtiness" (Morrison 72).

Under the Platonic lens, the immediate assumption is that Pecola is the lowest in the scale of degradation. Nevertheless, if analyzed in more depth one can see, because Morrison gives it away just before the first chapter begins, that the most degraded figure is the child Pecola will not be able to bear healthy. As the title appears to suggest, superlatives are key to this novel, they will not only affect adjectives addressed to the characters but the characters themselves. Morrison blurs the strict limits of the definition of *superlative*, it does not always have good implications anymore; instead, it is used to enhance the effect of degradation.

A DANDELION IS NOT A ROSE

The Third Man Argument, in Morrison's story, is reenacted in ascending motion. The main characters are captured looking up to whom they believe worthier than themselves. The moral value of things is blurred by the trauma they are sustaining: "We mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom" (Morrison 175). What is supposed to be good is mistaken for something bad, but, more often, what is traumatic is accepted as normal or tolerable; violence becomes so common and so attached to moments where passion emerges that the two things become interchangeable.

Nevertheless, there is one concept that is stretched throughout the novel: beauty. The use of the superlative within the title seems to point out that the burden of not being able to become beautiful will not change, it will just become more absolute in the mind of the three girls as their innocence is shattered. The first challenge they must face is that they will never be able to be pretty if this only comprehends white people's appearance. The first step towards degradation is being convinced there is something so unattainable for you that it's not even comprehensible:

> Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (Morrison 48)

Pecola sees that blue eyes are praised and loved so she wants them, she envies the value that comes with them. Claudia, on the other hand, resents Shirley Temple and Mary Jane; she displays anger in contrast to Pecola's envy. Preceded by Dick and Jane and their perfect family, Shirley Temple and Mary Jane construct a space for deep self-hatred in their young minds.

The second level of the degradation of beauty within the novel begins with those that, belonging to the black community, try to stay away from it to comply with society's standards; those who abide by hooks' understanding of black society.[2] These people, mostly women, attempt to avoid acknowledging that, even though they are not considered as irremediably ugly as their peers because they have whiter skin, they will never possess the grace of being beautiful either, so they sacrifice themselves for a little bit of superiority. The clearest examples of this are the characters of Geraldine and Maureen Peal. The former is a woman who does not allow her child to play with black children because she believes they are dirty (Morrison 85). She is also black but because of her lighter skin and ironed hair she looks different from the rest of the black characters depicted in the novel. She is purposely trying to make her differences stand out. The latter, Maureen Peal, is the girls' classmate and all three of them envy her because of her dresses, softer hair and lighter eyes. She is often told she looks beautiful, which only means she looks whiter.

> These sugar-brown Mobile girls move through the streets without a stir. They are as sweet and plain as butter-cake. Slim ankles; long, narrow feet. They wash themselves with orange-colored Lifebuoy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet talc, clean their teeth with salt on a piece of rag, soften their skin with Jergens Lotion. (Morrison 80)

The task of avoiding one's "funkiness" (81), as instructed by the novel, is quite laborious. Pecola believes she can become what she is obsessed with, she creates her own blue eyes but, within she knows they are imperfect. She is still not acknowledged like white girls are. She will try to make her delusion expand to the rest of herself and this will drive her crazy because her reality will not be able to co-exist with social structures.

This clash between fiction and truth will appear constantly throughout the novel. Pecola, as evinced by the Mary Jane scenes, will become tormented by the first level of beauty's degradation. She will be tortured by the conviction that women are less than men and black women are less than anyone but their children; the rest of the black community will cast the Breedloves away and Maureen Peal will haunt the three girls to provoke further questioning on what it is that makes *her* beautiful and not *them*:

> If she was cute – and if anything could be believed, she *was* – then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts,

[2] *Cf.* page 2.

> the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. (Morrison 72)

The novel emanates from the inner core of the community, from the seed of their disenchantment. Claudia's interest in Pecola derives from her being everyone's scapegoat, in fact, Claudia adds: "All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness" (Morrison 203). Pecola is pitied because she represents the superlative example of the consequences of living in one's degraded condition. The further away from beauty she believes she is, the bluer she will want her eyes to become. She is the incarnation of the suffering happening within the black community, and if we think of Plato, we are led to understand the fact that it happens even outside its limits. Marigolds aren't growing in anyone else's garden; nobody can access the supposed ideal.

The Third Man Argument is both the veil and the thread that holds all these degradations together. It is in charge of explaining all variations to the form of men and how, when socially contextualized, they are submitted to the yoke of this continuous degradation. For the characters, especially the women, pushing against these circumstances means spending a lot of money on products and clothing. That is another setback for the Breedloves and the MacTeers, none of them have enough money to pretend. When Pauline and Cholly move to Lorain they realize that the people they expected to be comfortable around, reject them: "Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was the lonesomest time of my life" (Morrison 115).

Pauline starts spending money and is forced to work due to the lack of it. She needs clothes and makeup, not because she likes them but to be well-regarded by the women she meets. At the same time, her husband starts spending their money on drinking and never quits. Cholly Breedlove is a complex character, both aggressive and insecure due to the mistreatments he suffered during his childhood: he always appears damaged. As the detonator of the plot, he is the first to be seen as someone bad. He is looking up in the scale of degradation and questioning his idea of God, therefore, of all things perfect. Yet, this is subverted–from perfect to imperfect–when the story of him losing his virginity is told. Two white men stare at him while he is having sex in the woods, looking down on him, making him feel like a puppet. Their intentions trigger the Third Man Argument and widen the space between the supposed archetype and its object (Morrison 146-147).

> He wondered if God looked like that. No. God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that – holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it to the ground and spill the red guts so niggers could eat the sweet, warm insides. (Morrison 132)

The character Cholly is trying to fit into the stereotype of the Supreme Good is Blue, a man he loved and who took care of him. But, if Blue is black, if his hair is not white and his eyes are not blue, he cannot be God, because He only has one image, or so has Cholly been taught. Therefore, he concludes, it must be the Devil that looks like Blue and, consequently, "Cholly preferred him" (Morrison 132).

If the black community does not look like God, they might not be meant to follow him; white people must be superior if He who created the world made them look like Him, made them beautiful. If Cholly does not look like God, he does not have to act like God. He has felt dirty due to white people's looks, so he will, on his own terms, continue to be dirty. He is unconsciously applying the objection of the Third Man Argument, his character rebels against a world of archetypes: if the archetype is so far away from him then why must he live according to it. The narrator talks about Cholly's freedom (Morrison 158), he feels free because he was abandoned, he has to answer to no one and nothing to lose. Therefore, being alone he is in a godlike state or, at least, not under another god's rules. This, as he understands it, means he is allowed to do anything he wants because he has already hit rock-bottom. He is "[d]angerously free" (Morrison 157). The perception of the archetype is in the eye of the beholder; thus, everything is questioned through it: Pecola compares herself to Shirley Temple; Cholly concludes the Devil must be black if God is white; and Pauline will never see herself in the films she likes to drown herself in.

The Bluest Eye brings to the reader's attention that whether Plato or Aristotle were right does not matter as long as the characters remain under the illusion of the Argument's validity, as it corrupts their perception of reality. Cholly and Soaphead will question God about the truth He is supposed to hold, and they will find themselves alone. They will always have to face the questions themselves or find someone else to substitute the Supreme Being. In the end, the degradation and misleading ideals provoke their disconnection from the creator. What the characters are not aware of is that this philosophical theory has no specifically assigned roles. Instead, because of its *ad infinitum* condition, they are above and below an indeterminate number of elements, rendering the search pointless.

An attempt at eliminating the Third Man Argument can also be found in the novel. To prevent its setting in motion, the two units (archetype and degradation) must be reduced to one,[3] thus eliminating the separation between the archetype and the object it represents. But this never happens. Repeatedly and subtly throughout the novel, there are efforts to eliminate the gap enforced by the Third Man Argument, this could only be attained by turning the duality (archetype/object) into a single element which is proven to be an impossible endeavor (Morrison 48; 137; 143; 156).

The clearest example can be found on page 143: "His second fear materialized. She smiled and jumped down the three leaning steps to join him. Her eyes full of

[3] If objects do not have an archetype because they are themselves the archetype, then the space required for the Third Man to introduce itself would be eliminated.

compassion, and Cholly remembered that he was the bereaved". In this fragment the reader will see the word *second*, and later the *three leaning steps*. This is a very clear representation of the Third Man Argument as Pauline has to descend three steps (must be degraded) to join Cholly, whom will be the love of her life as well as her ruin.

There is also a further connection to beauty in the novel, Dante is referenced a few times (Morrison 167; 171), these allusions import another question to Platonism: does Ugliness exist or is it only a degradation of beauty? Often the characters worry about neatness, about not being clean enough due to their dark skins.

> A triumph of cosmic neatness. But this neatness, the neatness of Dante, was in the orderly sectioning and segregating of all levels of evil and decay. In the world it was not so. The most exquisite-looking ladies sat on toilets, and the most dreadful-looking had pure and holy yearnings. God had done a poor job, and Soaphead suspected that he himself could have done better. It was in fact a pity that the Maker had not sought his counsel. (Morrison 171)

Dante's *Divine Comedy* separates those in Hell in various circles depending on the severity of their crimes. In our world, criminals are let loose according to this character. Those who are neat can mingle with those who are not and Soaphead is against it. He is, like Cholly, looking up to his creator and wondering if he is so perfect in the end. Is being perfectly ugly a possibility or is Soaphead, along with the rest of the black community, meant to be at the last of the circles for the evil in their decay? While convinced that he could have done a better job endorsing Dante's system than God did, he notices something relevant: degradation extends over society like a wasting land. The Third Man Argument reveals itself once again: Soaphead is blending the degraded with the supposedly ideal, therefore everything has been mixed due to the *ad infinitum* condition of the theory, hence, archetypes are diluted.

This is also demonstrated in Morrison's shaping of the nuances of the novel through the use of positive adverbs or adjectives when describing atrocities. While narrating Pecola's rape, she writes, "He wanted to fuck her – tenderly" (Morrison 160-161). This statement shows how reality is veiled for the characters and love and beauty acquire meanings that lean towards the grotesque. Language is one of the most prominent means for degradation in the novel; violence is transfigured into tenderness thanks to Morrison's subtle choice of words allowing contradicting qualities to co-exist in the characters.

A *FAILURE* OF COSMIC NEATNESS

In *The Bluest Eye*, the Third Man Argument is carried out. Therefore, the progress into degradation is laid out for the reader. Morrison, as we have seen in the third part of this article, shows a reality where those who are subject to the idea of archetypes live a much more distressing life, essentially because they are chasing something completely unattainable.

This procedure aligns with the reference to Du Bois (181), Morrison mirrors society and proves the Third Man Argument is a reality, reminding us of the waste land. If Du Bois' theory is true, then reality would be as degraded and barren as it is in the myth. Believing in the worth of archetypes has led the population to both an illusion of safety and a freeing danger. As happens with Cholly, even when one decides not to abide by the norm, he is held under a veil. Therefore, by behaving against it you can only further it more.

This claim could be legitimated through another author that has also tampered with the Third Man Argument. We would like to suggest the possibility of Morrison having given the Argentinian author Borges a literary nod through the infiltration of some elements of his poem "El golem" ("The Golem") in the philosophical reenactment of *The Bluest Eye*. In his text, Borges uses a Jewish myth as his source as he narrates the vicissitudes of the devoted rabbi Judah Loew who, convinced that he had learnt the language of God, used it to create a new being that would never be able to talk. Borges triggers Aristotle's argument and shows the reader its possible consequences (Botero Camacho 46-62). The golem, created by the words of man and not God's is another example of the copy of the copy of the copy, his degradation is shown in the inability to speak or even to understand the world around him. Three of Morrison's characters have experiences that resonate with Borges' writing: Soaphead Church, Cholly and Pecola. The archetypes reenacted in her text are forced upon the characters, consciously or not, by the people right above them in the hierarchy of their community. The three little girls still look up to their parents as if they were gods while their mothers are too busy being haunted by the men surrounding them; therefore, the only ones that will be able to question their creator directly will be the men.

The first person that could be linked to Borges' poem is Soaphead Church, a man that, after quitting his studies at the ministry, decides to proclaim himself a minister regardless (Morrison 171). He will engage directly with God and ask Him questions about his integrity and choices. He has a similar relationship with religion to that of the rabbi, who believes he can learn the word of God and create life himself. Soaphead is troubled because he knows he lives in sin, as he desires little girls over women because they do not smell, they do not "mind" (Morrison 179). Instead, their flat chests make them look more like boys, like men, and he would rather be a pedophile than homosexual. If he were to be the latter, he would be (according to the society portrayed in the novel) a degraded version of the ideal Man. Again, a copy of the copy of the copy.

While acknowledging his offenses, he blames God for them. Soaphead's deviancy is his reason to want to learn the word of God. If He was perfect, he would have not created such ugliness in him. He even goes as far as to say that, because God did not do his work properly, now he must make it right: "I weep for You that I had to do your work for You" (Morrison 178), and "You forgot, Lord. You forgot how and when to be God" (Morrison 179). Now, he has to become God and help the little girls.

When Pecola appears at his doorstep, he is horrified by His lack of compassion towards the child: "She must have asked you for them for a very long time, and you hadn't replied. (A habit, I could have told her, a long-ago habit broken for Job - but no more)" (Morrison 178). Soaphead shows his resentment towards God but, also wonders about the significance of naming things which, in the end, is a question of what makes one's identity or what is identity in general:

> By the way, I added the Micah - Elihue Micah Whitcomb. But I am called Soaphead Church. I cannot remember how or why I got the name. What makes one name more a person than another? Is the name a real thing, then? And the person only what his name says? Is that why to the simplest and friendliest of questions: "What is your name?" put to you by Moses, You would not say and said instead "I am who I am". (Morrison 178)

This, seems to resonate with another fragment of Borges' poem which echoes the long-discussed subject of the name of the rose:

> *Si (como afirma el griego en el Cratilo)*
>
> *el nombre es arquetipo de la cosa*
>
> *en las letras de 'rosa' está la rosa*
>
> *y todo el Nilo en la palabra 'Nilo'* (263)
>
> If every name is (as the Greek maintains
>
> In the *Cratylus*) the archetype of its thing,
>
> Among the letters of ring, resides the ring,
>
> And in the word *Nile* all the Nile remains.
>
> (Hollander 111)

Through this conundrum we can begin to trace a resemblance between the rabbi and Soaphead's character. Yet, it is the fact that Soaphead will be the one to convince Pecola that she has been given her blue eyes, which will transform him in the rabbi within the novel, making Pecola his golem.

The other man in the novel that will challenge his creator directly is Cholly, Pecola's father. Cholly sees such resemblance in his daughter of the Pauline he once knew that, in a burst of the violence that is confused with love all throughout the novel, he rapes her. He is the big and strong father that will come and play with Jane in the most twisted of ways and the metaphorical dog (Morrison 16) that will come and play with Jane and run away after, leaving her damned and alone:

> He wanted to fuck her – tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold […] His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made – a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. (Morrison 160-161)

In "El golem" ("The Golem"), Borges writes the following interaction between the rabbi–the unnatural golem's father–and the creature. He is troubled wondering what he should be feeling toward something he has created yet knows to be an abomination; the adjectives Borges uses seem to deliberately challenge each other:

> *El rabí lo miraba con ternura*
>
> *Y con algún horror. '¿Cómo' (se dijo)*
>
> *'pude engendrar este penoso hijo*
>
> *Y la inacción dejé, que es la cordura?'* (265)
>
> The rabbi gazed on it with tender eyes
>
> And terror. *How* (he asked) *could it be done*
>
> *That I engender this distressing son?*
>
> *Inaction is wisdom. I left off being wise.*
>
> (Hollander 115)

Morrison's scene works well as a reply to this stanza. She gives the reader the point of view of the father while he is raping his own daughter, looking at her like the rabbi looks at his creation. In the poem, the man questions his own actions, he questions his use of the word of God; the use of the vital breath to create another notch in the belt of the *ad infinitum* degradation. And the poetic voice asks: *"¿Quién nos dirá las cosas que sentía/Dios, al mirar a su rabino en Praga?"* (Borges 265) 'Who can tell us the feeling in His breast/ As God gazed on His rabbi there in Prague?' (Hollander 115), thus culminating the presence of the Third Man Argument in the poem. Instead, Morrison uses degradation to reenact what the gift of the vital breath would become in the society she puts into words. Cholly describes "a hollow suck of air" (Morrison 161), the consequence of a thrust through which his soul has flown onto her. Instead of the description of how she is given air, the reader is given the removal of it, followed by "a rapid loss of air from a circus balloon" (161), a parody of the gift of life. Ironically, in this interaction, Pecola not only perpetuates her status as the golem of the novel, but her baby is conceived, a baby that is born dead so it will never be able to speak.

Lastly, gathering the connection of the two texts as possible reenactments of the Third Man Argument and the hypothetical chance of Morrison having teased towards Borges' interpretation of the myth of the Golem; we intend to demonstrate that Morrison might have seen Aristotle's theory in Borges and used his version of it.

The poem mentions a cat yet, none of the versions of the Jewish myth of the golem have a cat in them. Borges explains this to his reader:

> *Algo anormal y tosco hubo en el Golem,*
>
> *Ya que a su paso el gato del rabino*

Se escondía. (Ese gato no está en Scholem

Pero, a través del tiempo, lo adivino). (256)

Something eerie, gross, about the Golem,

For, at his very coming, the rabbi's cat

Would vanish. (The cat cannot be found in Scholem;

Across the years, I divine it, for all that.)

(Hollander 113)

There are two elements that are crucial to our linking of the texts in this fragment. The first is a cat that also appears in one of Morrison's chapter titles: "SEETHECATITGOESMEOWMEOWCOMEANDPLAYWITHJANETHEKITTENWILLNOTPLAYPLAYPLAYPLA" (79), anticipating the interaction between the cat and the golem of this story, Pecola. The second is Borges' accusation towards the Golem of having something that makes the cat hide when he walks past it. This resembles Morrison's description of Pecola's encounter with Geraldine's cat, a scene collected in the chapter mentioned above:

> Geraldine opened the door.
>
> 'What is this?' Her voice was mild, as though asking a perfectly reasonable question. 'Who is this girl?'
>
> 'She killed our cat,' said Junior. 'Look.' He pointed to the radiator, where the cat lay, its blue eyes closed, leaving only an empty, black, and helpless face. […]
>
> Up over the hump of the cat's back she looked.
>
> 'Get out.' she said, her voice quit. 'You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house.'
>
> The cat shuddered and flicked his tail. (89)

By contrasting the two, the nuances of Morrison's fragment become brighter. In Borges' text there is something wrong with the Golem. In Morrison's what is important is that the possibility of something being wrong with the child becomes the only valid one. As she reenacts the degradation of the Third Man Argument, there is a possibility that she uses Borges' cat to question the archetypes and the fragility of subjective truth. As readers, we already know Geraldine's story, her contempt makes her believe her son immediately when he accuses Pecola of killing her beloved cat. He is only perpetuating the archetypes he has been taught. He lures Pecola into his house and throws the cat at her so he will hurt her. Yet, Pecola never does anything to harm the creature, in fact, she pities him because she finds herself in him: "He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluish green. The light made them shine like blue ice. Pecola rubbed the cat's head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her" (Morrison 88). For a moment, they seem to recognize each

other and Pecola sees in him what she would look like if she were to have what she desires most. This tender moment infuriates Geraldine's boy resulting in the torture and almost killing of the pet. To further establish the resemblance, the second part of the stanza is also essential to what we believe to be the link between these two works. Aside from mentioning that this cat is not a part of the original myth, Borges writes about "foreseeing" it through time. Opening the possibility of time being a fluid entity, one that can be trusted when searching for clarity, is a shared pursuit between Morrison and Borges as the structure of *The Bluest Eye* relies on the use of different timelines in order to look for the things that were kept in secret or never said (Morrison 3). Without the glimpses the reader is given into the past it would not be as easy to understand the nuances and struggles that define each character's life. The glimpse into Pauline and Cholly's childhood, where they suffered the traumas that lead them to treat their children like they do, is essential to comprehend how the Third Man Argument warps reality because, even though they do not notice, they are traveling within the *ad infinitum* progression of degradation. The past is crucial to understand how the most degraded version defines itself through time. Although they believe their lives change, they always come back to the same roles and dynamics that are ingrained in their belief of the archetype's truth. The insight that future Claudia gives to the story, describing her past with the knowledge of an adult, telling the reader Pecola's story while knowing how it ends, is also what helps the reader find their own place in the narrative. It eases the access to a critical approach towards the plot. The philosophical interpretation that is being pursued in this article is just another way of shedding light to the social critique Morrison aims for in the novel. Ugliness, or the lack of beauty according to social standards, are both nuanced and enhanced the more the reader learns about the characters. Financial and racial exclusion are linked as "economic, racial, and ethnic difference is erased and replaced by a purportedly equal ability to consume, even though what is consumed are more or less competing versions of the same white image" (Kuenz 422). Ugliness becomes the embodiment of their general troubles as the characters become a part of commodity culture through their frustration and consequential consumption of affordable versions of beauty, Mary Janes in Pecola's case and cinema in Pauline's. They consume reproductions of their ideals and in their absorption the reader is allowed to unveil the process of the reenactment of the Third Man Argument.

RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES

> Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest's blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes. (Morrison 45)

If the *Dick and Jane* fragment serves as a pattern under which the reader can understand the novel from its beginning, the fragment quoted above is the omen

that predicts Pecola's final state. The degradation of society can only lead to the degradation of the mind.

Morrison makes the consequences of the Third Man Argument worse for the characters so they become clearer to the reader. Once the novel reaches its end, one can only sit in Claudia's position and understand why she watches from afar:

> We tried to see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her. Our flowers never grew. I was convinced that Frieda was right, that I had planted them too deeply. How could I have been so sloven? So we avoided Pecola Breedlove – forever. (Morrison 202-203)

Having and holding on to archetypes which, as we have seen in the three previous sections, are superlative or degraded, can only come with a great number of consequences. The last chapter of the book is titled: "LOOKLOOKHERECOMESAFRIENDTHEFRIENDWILLPLAYWITHJANETHEYWILLPLAYAGOODGAMEPLAYJANEPLAY" (Morrison 191). Pecola has finally found company, but only in herself. She is the degraded Jane and in her behavior we see the consequences of the philosophical argument. The degraded Jane can no longer play because she has no playground and no friends. She is left in a twisted town with a crooked mind. Therefore, she starts talking to herself; while being a golem she transforms herself into an archetype because, in infinite imperfection, she can play the role she wants.

As we have previously stated, it is the point of view of the speaker which matters when telling a story. Claudia, as a child, is the ideal subject to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together. She still has to form her own idea of what the world is, and throughout the novel, she listens and learns. Through other people's stories and opinions, she starts categorizing all the characters in their corresponding social places: "Little by little we began to piece a story together, a secret, terrible, awful story. And it was only after two or three such vaguely overheard conversations that we realized that the story was about Pecola" (Morrison 187).

Pecola's identity splits in two, allowing the Third Man to be enacted, there is a part of her who believes her blue eyes will last forever and another who knows they do not even exist. She calls her other self "dearie" (Morrison 193) and wonders:

> No. Really. You are my very best friend. Why didn't I know you before?
>
> *You didn't need me before.*
>
> Didn't need you?
>
> *I mean…you were so unhappy before. I guess you didn't notice me before.*
>
> I guess you're right. And I was so lonely for friends. And you were right here. Right before my eyes.
>
> *No, honey. Right after your eyes.* (Morrison 194, original emphasis)

This chapter is the ultimate representation in the novel of how archetypes affect one's psyche. Morrison uses the reference to *Dick and Jane* until the end to show us the process of degradation brought to an extreme. By becoming her own friend, Pecola synthesizes the degradation all characters have to go through. She does not admit to herself she was raped by her father; she does not want to acknowledge her previous life now that she has blue eyes and her future looks brighter. She blames everything bad happening to her on other people's jealousy and does not want to listen to her other half who is aware of what her circumstances have meant for her so far. Until the end, Pecola fights her own trauma alone.

The Third Man Argument, as represented in *The Bluest Eye*, tackles much more than the question of what a Man is. The description of the realities Pecola and the other two girls live in, along with the adults' testimonies, brings a very complex experience to life. In the oppression she feels, Pecola encapsulates the gender and race-related trauma that has trickled down from generation to generation. Thanks to Morrison, a philosophical question that is often abstracted into laws and theses is transformed into an incredibly human and subtle reflection, as Zamalin and Schur argued happened in *Playing in the Dark*. Right before the afterword, she reminds the reader of the superlatives, of Cholly's tenderness and the effect of love's degradation: "He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her" (Morrison 204). This shows how extreme the lives of the characters are and how eloquently Morrison delivers such a complex context. The eyes Pecola believes she now possesses are those the archetypal deity would have given her yet, the "bluest I" is Morrison's metaphorical way of showing us a degraded society through a philosophical theory adjusted to the truth.

CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING RACIAL BEAUTY

The Bluest Eye paints the breathtaking portrait of Pecola Breedlove, through intense and traumatic stories the reader is made aware of the subtleties Morrison intertwines between the lines. Pecola's childhood, along with Claudia's and Frieda's, revolves around fighting or succumbing to what they have learned they must become, whether they are willing to be unhappy with reality or happy living in delusion. The author simply gives shape to things that happen outside fiction, Borges wrote a poem that resorted to fantasy while dealing with the Third Man Argument, the result of Morrison's experiment is a painfully faithful representation of reality.

Throughout the article, beauty is discussed as a useful concept in order to understand how profoundly linked Aristotle's philosophical theory and the character's psyche are. It demonstrates that the Third Man Argument can be reenacted in an ascending motion thus, portraying characters that are always looking for something that will make them worthier, more perfect, more similar to the superlative archetypes, while they are descending. Beauty remains ideal, unattainable in a society where everyone believes they are lacking something at their core. While the reader becomes aware of the process of degradation, the characters become more obviously involved in it by rejecting their own identities as

black people or by trying to consume those of the people considered archetypical. In their search for something to hold on to, someone to become, characters like Soaphead Church or Cholly give the reader the possibility of embarking on the philosophical journey of discovering whether one can be perfectly ugly, perfectly deviant or if there are only ideals of things generally considered good and the rest are just their degradations.

Claudia also tries to discern the limits and definitions of "good" and "bad" as she matures by picking up the stories and testimonies left by those around her. She is an unreliable narrator that offers a text representing the copy of the memory of the statements she overhears. Consequently, the reader can only perceive Pecola through a veil of scrapped cloths stitched together,[4] not only can we discover Claudia's opinions but the ongoing criticism she hears about her friend, and due to those statements and the clash between her mind and reality, Pecola becomes delirious. She thinks she has become all she lacks in her last shot at being seen. Consequently, the bluest "I" reveals itself, and the reader is left to answer the question of what a Man is who is not isolated, through the lens of Morrison's reenactment of the Third Man Argument. The author brings many masterpieces into one. We have addressed the possible presence of the waste land myth and how Lorain is more than metaphorically barren, Dante's spiraling Hell and the stakes of self-doom and Borges' possible connection to the text, as he apparently uses the Third Man Argument in the same way Morrison does. These intertextual connections could all work to construct the air of disenchantment that flows through the novel in order to communicate the trauma of its story. Our philosophical interpretation is only one more resource to put this novel in the limelight and understand the input of other researchers. Du Bois' theories are broadened through Morrison's voice, feminist black women such as bell hooks are brought to mind. No other interpretation of *The Bluest Eye* is denied through the Third Man Argument but heightened as it brings forth the structure of the layered reality that Morrison chooses to depict in her opera prima.

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[4] "The point of view of a child alters the priority an adult would assign the information" (Morrison 209).

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