# CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background of the Study

Slavery has emerged in many forms throughout history. When the English colony first landed in this country [America], they immediately encountered one "race" problem in the Indians (Gossett 3)." There, slavery appeared to assist the running of gold mines and the production of cotton, coffee, tobacco and sugar. At first, slaves that were employed in such production process were Native Americans but as the requirements of slaves raised, European colonizers and English tried to be the slave-trader by importing slaves from Africa to replace those Native American slaves. Even though the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch controlled most of the slave trade to the Americas from 1500 to 1700, English and North American traders become the dominant trader of the business after 1730. During the late 17th and 18th centuries, millions of Africans were brought across the Atlantic by English traders and that transatlantic slave trade created one of the major forced dispersion throughout history. It was the white man's relationship with the Negro rather than his relationship with the Indian which was eventually rationalized into the most racist doctrine this country has known (28).

African American people who used to be slaves by working in farms in South, a rural area, tried to find a better living by migrating to North, the urban one. It is known as Great Migration. The first migration began in 1910 and still continued in the early 1940s. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans settled

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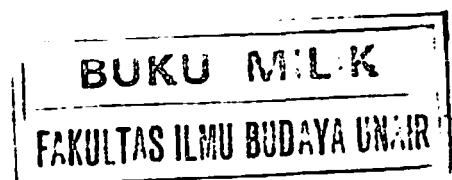
in Ohio. The black population grew significantly there. It made them racially forced to live apart from the whites and the racial discrimination practices by white people toward the African-Americans still obviously persisted. They were afraid they would lose their jobs since the African-American immigrants were willing to be paid less than them (online). In addition, in social aspects, there were some restrictions for African-Americans in entering some places which were supposed to be public places and the stereotype of being the ancestry of Africans could not completely removed. It caused much racial problems in several aspects of life. Thus the bond among African-Americans, especially family, took an important role in serving love and security since the people of African Americans still had to struggle for the racial judgment.

By looking at such circumstances, race is perceived by many people to be the basis of treating people unequally. It is because "the concept [of race] has sutured otherwise vague and possibly incoherent beliefs about white supremacy by synonymizing skin color and other phenotypical features with deviance and inferiority (Cashmore 335)." It makes skin color and other phenotypical features are important to note. In contemporary society, white is no more assumed as purity but rather as power and privilege (451). Since racism as an ideology has dominance thus power in a society then no wonder if race also gives impact to the beauty norm around the world (Tate 4). The concept of black versus white, ugly versus beautiful is a discourse of difference that work in a racist society. In terms of beauty discourse, Cashmore stated the majority of research on the racialization of beauty has focused on black women. This focus was a response to the extent of

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black women's exclusion from dominant beauty standards (50).

Toni Morrison, an African American writer, reveals the idea of beauty through her novel, *The Bluest Eye*. She got her inspiration for *The Bluest Eye* from a real-life experience from her childhood. A friend of hers had told her she wished for blue eyes. Morrison herself stated in the Afterword of her novel:

> It [*The Bluest Eye*] was to say something about why she prayed for so radical an alteration. Implicit in her desire was racial self-loathing ... wondering about one learns that. Who told her? Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? (Morrison 168)

From this anecdote, we can deduce Morrison's objective in writing her novel; Morrison saw how her own people denigrated their own race and appearance, and instead wanted to be like white people. Morrison sensed something very wrong with this type of thinking, and wanted to make black people perceive their own beauty, to make them able to be proud of themselves.

Toni Morrison is a female writer who received the Nobel prize in literature in 1993. Her maiden name is Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, a small town in the northern of Ohio that also becomes the setting of place of the novel. After graduating from senior high school, she left Lorain for Washington to continue her study at Howard University. She graduated and received a B.A. title in 1953. In 1957 she returned to Howard as a lecturer in her faculty until 1964. When she was in Washington, she met and married Harold

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Marrison and bore him two children, Harold and Slade, before she got divorced.

Toni Morrison wrote novels, short fictions, children's books (some of them were written with her daughter, Slade Morrison), non-fiction books and essays. Her first three novels were *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), and *Song of Solomon* (1977). Her other novels were *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and many more. Her first three novels, although different in plot and structure, are thematically consistent, exposing various difficulties faced by black people in different social classes. Toni Morrison was also involved in many "cinematic, theatrical, musical, poetic, and dance production[s] (Gillespie 252)."

The Bluest Eye takes an African-American community in Ohio, United States, as the main part of the novel. *The Bluest Eye*, written in 1962, reveals problems around racial identity. It tells a story of a black little girl, Pecola Breedlove, growing up in a society dominated with idealized images of white families. As a black girl she is stereotyped by the white as ugly, rude, and dirty, and this creates a particular desire of fulfillment of love in her mind. The lack of love, or even invisibility in the eyes of others due to her race causes her to long for blue eyes, symbolizing the white ideal. She wants the very bluest eyes in order not to be seen as black, with all the stereotypes it brings. The socially constructed and racialized beauty ideal, always present in the gaze of every white person, billboard, movie and magazine are the opposite of her—blue eyes, blond hair and pink skin. Such notions of racial identity make her want to conform to the West, white constructions rooted in her mind.

Pecola, who lives with her uncaring mother, Pauline, and drunken father,

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Cholly, attempts to escape from her severe situation by seeking hope in her prayers for beauty, which she thinks that it will lead her to be loved. Each night Pecola prays for blue eyes, thinking that if she looked different everything would be better. After being raped by his father, Pecola then comes to a faith healer Soaphead Church asking for blue eyes. He tricks her into poisoning an old dog, claiming the dog's sudden death as a sign from God that her wish will be granted. In the end of the story, Pecola is found deluding herself into believing that everyone is jealous of her miraculous, new blue eyes.

By studying the case of African American, the writer will present how literary works are able to contribute to a better understanding of the various stances on racial discourse considered in the case of being African-Americans. In other words, it is to suggest the extent to which a literary work can assist in the educative needs of racial discourse. It shows how literature takes role as a precise media in completing and illustrating racial issues. In this case, the writer would like to study how an African-American especially a little girl suffered from being marginalized by the beauty standard as portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*. The appearance of Pecola as the most delicate and vulnerable member of society who is overwhelmed by the cultural and social standard value imposed by the whites inspires the writer to study how an African-American little girl fails to determine her own beauty due to the outlook of the mainstream society where she lives in.

The writer chooses this novel as a study because this novel is very well written and contains a big problem, issues and message to society. *The Bluest Eye* has a magnificent role in illustrating how African-Americans experienced the

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notion of being racially discriminated through beauty norms that work in the society. It is interesting to question what actually needs to be done to solve the racial judgment problem which takes women, especially little girls, as the major victims. *The Bluest Eye* is a great mode to understand world's reality. When one looks at how black people are treated, one will see how humanity in general is valued.

Based on the explanation above, the writer considers several issues raised in *The Bluest Eye* to be analyzed. The main themes the writer will address are beauty discourse as portrayed in the novel through the African-American women characters and how such discourse gives impact to the main character, Pecola Breedlove, in defining her own beauty.

1. 2. Statement of the Problems

Regarding the background of the study above, there are several problems which become the research questions of this study, they are:

1. How is beauty racially defined by the black women characters in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

2. How does the idea of racialized beauty as defined by the black women characters affect Pecola Breedlove in defining her own beauty?

1. 3. Objective of the Study

This study is aimed to find out two important points as raised in the statement of the problems, they are:

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1. To explain how beauty is racially defined by the black women characters in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye.*

2. To present an analysis on the impact of racialized beauty as portrayed in the novel toward Pecola Breedlove in defining her own beauty.

1. 4. Significance of the Study

Generally, this study is expected to enrich knowledge about how the idea of beauty is exercised in racial discourse as portrayed in the African-American community in the United States in 1940's. Furthermore, the writer hopes that this study can give any contribution to the study of literature in general, especially in English Department, Faculty of Humanities of Airlangga University.

1. 5. Scope and Limitation

In order to gain a comprehensive analysis and systematic understanding according to the statement of the problems, the writer focuses the analysis on the idea of racialized beauty defined by several African-American women characters as portrayed in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Furthermore, the analysis concentrates on four women characters, namely, Maureen Peal, Geraldine, Pauline Breedlove and Pecola Breedlove. It is due to those first three characters give big impact to Pecola in defining her identity as a black little girl who lives in a society where white and the attributes that it carries considered as the beauty norms. The limitation of the study is not aimed to narrow the analysis. It is aimed to   gain   a

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focused and deeper analysis about the portrayal of how beauty is racialized due to the racism practices toward African-Americans in the United States.

1. 6. Theoretical Background

The study focuses on the portrayal of racialized beauty as defined by African-American women characters in *The Bluest Eye* and how it gives impact to the main character, Pecola Breedlove, in defining her own beauty. The novel presents issue of how beauty is constructed by the white dominant society. In this case, beauty is not neutral but dynamic and racialized. Living in a society where beauty is assumed as white, the non-white women are seen as the racialized other, either exotic or different. In this study, the writer uses African American criticism proposed by Lois Tyson to reveal the three levels of racism practice. Since this study focuses on beauty, the concept of racialized beauty proposed by Shirley Anne Tate is highly drawn in this study. It is expected that African American criticism will be able to help the writer in analyzing the idea of racialized beauty thus challenge African-American women characters in searching for white beauty as portrayed in the novel.

1. 7. Method of the Study

1. Technique of Data Collecting

The technique of data collecting is applied in certain steps. The first step is library research. In analyzing Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, library research is used to gain adequate information about African American criticism especially on

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the idea of racialized beauty. It is applied by collecting important information from printed materials such as books, dictionaries, and critics. Collecting information from internet is also applied to gain critics, reviews and commentaries toward the issue in the novel related to the study. Afterward, the next step is close reading to explore certain data in order to understand the content of the novel and the meaning behind it. The third step is classification. The writer will make the classification of the data to differentiate problems and determine the data that can be used in the study.

2. Technique of Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used as the technique of data analysis. It is applied to give descriptive explanation of the problems found in the text through the dialogues, events, and narrations in the text. The writer uses African American criticism and the concept of racialized beauty is highly drawn to analyze the problems. The first analysis is to present various responds given by the black women characters in defining beauty in terms of racialization and the second one is to explain the impact of such definition toward the main character of the novel. The analysis is aimed to find the findings which are stated in the conclusion.

1. 8. Definition of Key Terms

African-American: an American of African descent.

Beauty   : quality of persons or things that gives pleasure to the mind or senses especially the sense of the sight. In this case, the quality

is somehow not neutral, it demands either local or global norms.

Race : classification system that categorizes people into groups based on physical appearance or geographic ancestry. In terms of social construction, the word 'race' has negative meanings since many people make it as the basis of treating people differently.

Racialized beauty: beauty which is valued based on racial consideration.