

## APPENDICES

### I. TONI MORRISON'S BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS

**Toni Morrison** (born **Chloe Ardelia Wofford**; February 18, 1931) is an American novelist, editor, and professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed characters. Among her best known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*. She also was commissioned to write the libretto for a new opera, *Margaret Garner*, first performed in 2005. She won the Nobel Prize in 1993 and in 1987 the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*.

Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard who met to discuss their work. She went to one meeting with a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes. She later developed the story as her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). She wrote it while raising two children and teaching at Howard. In 2000 it was chosen as a selection for Oprah's Book Club.

In 1975 her novel *Sula* (1973) was nominated for the National Book Award. Her third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), brought her national attention. The book was a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the first novel by a black writer to be so chosen since Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940. It won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

In 1987 Morrison's novel *Beloved* became a critical success. When the novel failed to win the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, a number of writers protested over the omission. Shortly afterward, it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the American Book Award. That same year, Morrison took a visiting professorship at Bard College.

*Beloved* was adapted into the 1998 film of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover. Morrison later used Margaret Garner's life story again in the libretto for a new opera, *Margaret Garner*, with music by Richard Danielpour. In May 2006, *The New York Times Book Review* named *Beloved* the best American novel published in the previous twenty-five years.

In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her citation reads: Toni Morrison, "who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality." She is currently the last American to have been awarded the honor. Shortly afterward, a fire destroyed her Rockland County, New York home.

In 1996 the National Endowment for the Humanities selected Morrison for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. federal government's highest honor for achievement in the humanities. Morrison's lecture, entitled "The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations," began with the aphorism, "Time, it seems, has no future." She cautioned against the misuse of history to diminish expectations of the future.

Morrison was honored with the 1996 National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, which is awarded to a writer "who has enriched our literary heritage over a life of service, or a corpus of work."

Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not identify her works as feminist. She has stated that she thinks "it's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy, and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things."

In addition to her novels, Morrison has also co-written books for children with her younger son, Slade Morrison, who worked as a painter and musician. Slade died on December 22, 2010, aged 45.

## **Her Works:**

### **Novels**

- *The Bluest Eye* (1970; ISBN 0-452-28706-5)
- *Sula* (1974; ISBN 1-4000-3343-8)
- *Song of Solomon* (1977; ISBN 1-4000-3342-X)
- *Tar Baby* (1981; ISBN 1-4000-3344-6)
- *Beloved* (1987; ISBN 1-4000-3341-1)
- *Jazz* (1992; ISBN 1-4000-7621-8)
- *Paradise* (1997; ISBN 0-679-43374-0)
- *Love* (2003; ISBN 0-375-40944-0)
- *A Mercy* (2008; ISBN 978-0-307-26423-7)
- *Home* (2012)

### **Children's literature (with Slade Morrison)**

- *The Big Box* (1999)
- *The Book of Mean People* (2002)

### **Short fiction**

- "Recitatif" (1983)

## **Plays**

- *Dreaming Emmett* (performed 1986)
- *Desdemona* (first performed 15 May 2011 in Vienna)

## **Libretti**

- *Margaret Garner* (first performed May 2005)

## **Non-fiction**

- *The Black Book* (1974)
- *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)
- *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (editor) (1992)
- *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (co-editor) (1997)
- *Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (April 2004)
- *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, edited by Carolyn C. Denard (April 2008)
- *Burn This Book: Essay Anthology*, editor (2009)

## **Articles**

- "Introduction." Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. [1885] *The Oxford Mark Twain*, edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. xxxii-xli.

## **II. SUMMARY OF *THE BLUEST EYE***

The novel opens with the voice of Claudia MacTeer, though she isn't named until later. Claudia remembers an autumn of her childhood when she and her sister Frieda planted marigolds, but they would not grow. Claudia remembers her deprived and oppressed childhood in a poor African-American community. Her mother was so embattled with poverty and work that she had no emotional energy left to provide tender care for her two daughters. She used shame on them regularly. Once, when Claudia got sick, her mother complained unendingly about the trouble she was causing, but, nevertheless, her mother tended to her to help her get well.

One autumn, Pecola Breedlove came to live with the MacTeers as a special "case" sent by the county because her father, Cholly Breedlove, had burned his family's house and was put outdoors. Mrs. Breedlove was living with her employers, Charlie Breedlove, Pecola's brother, was living with relatives, and Pecola was left to the county to care for. While she was with them, Pecola got her first period. She was shocked at the blood and it took Frieda's help for her to understand it was a normal part of life.

The Breedlove apartment was a two-room affair that used to be a storefront. Its furniture was dilapidated and no one cared for it. The degradation of the furniture and the living quarters both contributed to and resulted from the Breedlove family's general degradation. The Breedloves were all ugly. When people examined this fact, they realized the Breedloves believed in their own ugliness, took it up as a sort of obligatory cloak to wear all the time. One Saturday morning in October the Breedloves woke up to a very cold apartment. Mrs. Breedlove threatened Cholly Breedlove if he did not start the fire. When he didn't, she threw cold water on him,

initiating a vicious fight that left him unconscious. Pecola held still throughout the fight, wishing she could disappear.

Pecola often looked at herself in the mirror, wondering at her ugliness. She settled on her eyes as her ugliest feature and wished to have blue eyes. She prayed for a year to no avail, but decided to continue hoping. Pecola was friends with three prostitutes who lived on the second floor of her family's building. They were kind to her, spoke to her respectfully, gave her clothes and candy, and told her amusing stories.

Mr. MacTeer worked hard to keep his family warm through the winter. His hard work made him emotionally distant all winter long. One winter, Claudia and Frieda became preoccupied with a new girl at school, a mulatto universally admired for her beauty by black and white alike. One afternoon, Maureen Peel invited Claudia and Frieda to walk home with her. On their way, they came across Pecola being bullied by a group of boys. Frieda rescued her and Maureen took her arm and chatted sociably with her, even buying Pecola an ice cream. However, Maureen began to taunt Pecola with the same jibes the boys had used--her black skin and her father's sexual visibility in the household. Pecola defended herself, but only half-heartedly. Claudia noticed her inability to stand up for herself.

There was a kind of woman who lived in Lorain, Ohio who lived a respectable life and did all they could to avoid funkiness. One such woman was named Geraldine. She was married and had a son, Junior. She was so repressed that she could not bring herself to nurture her son. She would only love her cat. Her son grew to hate the cat and would torture it. Geraldine taught her son that light skinned African Americans were better than dark skinned African Americans and should remain separate from them. One day Junior lured Pecola into his house and threw the cat on her face. Then

he began to torture the cat in front of her almost killing it. Geraldine happened to come home at that moment and blamed Pecola for it, calling her a nasty black bitch.

That winter Claudia and Frieda's parents took in a boarder, Mr. Henry. The girls found him one day with two prostitutes in their house. He bribed them not to tell and they didn't. Another day he found Frieda at home alone and tried to sexually molest her. When she told her parents, they beat Mr. Henry up and ran him off. Frieda worried that she was ruined now, like the prostitutes she and Claudia had heard about. The prostitutes she knew were either obese or thin from alcoholism. Wanting to be thin, the girls went in search of Pecola since they knew Pecola's father was an alcoholic and they wanted Pecola to procure liquor for them. They found Pecola at her mother's place a work, the wealthy home of a white family. Pecola inadvertently dropped her mother's berry cobbler and Mrs. Breedlove beat her severely and banished all three girls. They saw her cuddling the white child of the household as they left.

Pauline Williams Breedlove began life in Alabama. She hurt her foot on a nail and became permanently crippled as a result. She stayed at home taking care of the house for her family until she met and married Cholly and they moved north to Lorain, Ohio. In Lorain, Pauline felt out of place among the black community and resorted to going to the movies to escape her problems. There she learned a standard of beauty which placed her and her family on the bottom of a strict hierarchy. She came to identify with this standard and essentially abandoned her family in favor of the white family for whom she worked.

Cholly Breedlove was abandoned by his father before he was born and then abandoned by his mother, left to die, when he was only a few days old. His Aunt Jimmy raised him and he befriended a man, Blue Jack, who acted as a father to him.

His aunt died when he was only fourteen. After her funeral, he engaged in sexual play with a girl cousin. He was interrupted by white hunters who forced him to have sex with her against his will. He hated the girl rather than the men because they were too powerful a target. He left home the next day in search of his father. When he found his father, he was unable to talk to the man because he was so fully engaged in a crap game. Cholly cut all ties to people and lived an emotionally anarchic life. He married Pauline and the marriage quickly disintegrated. He was unable to parent his children. One Saturday afternoon in the spring, befuddled with alcohol, Cholly raped his eleven year old daughter and left her unconscious on the floor.

A man lived in the town named Soaphead Church. He posed as a spiritualist to the gullible people who needed all kinds of help. He came from a family descended from a British nobleman and a woman of African descent. The entire history of the family was marked by a strong desire to keep the light skin of their ancestor by marrying only light skinned partners. Soaphead Church was the culmination of this family. He lived as an eccentric, digging through the garbage, and he molested little girls. One day, Pecola Breedlove came to visit him to ask him for blue eyes. He told her if she made an offering of his landlady's dog, she might get her wish. He gave her a packet of poison. Unknowingly, she gave the dog poison and was horrified to see it die in front of her.

Claudia remembers the summer when her seeds would not grow. She and Frieda had planned to sell seeds of marigolds in order to win a bicycle. As they were selling the seeds, they overheard adults' conversation about Pecola being raped by her father and being pregnant. The adults all agreed that it would be better for child to die. Claudia and Frieda had decided to sacrifice their summer project and plant the

marigold seeds, praying over them that the child would live. The seeds never grew and Pecola's child died.

Pecola acquired an imaginary friend with whom she engaged in delighted conversation about her beautiful blue eyes, the envy of everyone. Her imaginary friend asked questions about Cholly raping her, her mother beating her senseless and not believing her, and Cholly raping her a second time. Pecola pushed these questions aside and returned to the topic of her eyes.

Claudia remembers seeing Pecola wandering around flapping her arms, nodding her head to unheard music and talking to herself. She always felt as though she had failed Pecola. She realized the entire community had, even the country. They had used Pecola as a scapegoat.