

## ABSTRACT

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IT'S ALL ABOUT COLOR: AN ANALYSIS OF COLOR SYMBOLISM IN TONI

MORRISON'S *SULA* AND *THE BLUEST EYE*

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This study examines Toni Morrison's use of symbolism in Sula and The Bluest Eye, especially archetypal and color symbolism, in an effort to recover the culture that has been lost to Diasporic Africans. Moreover, the color symbolism and symbolic archetypes that Morrison employs in both novels, but to a greater extent Sula, are a direct reflection of her awareness of the African ancestral heritage and spirituality associated with those colors and archetypes. A vast majority of the literary critiques of Sula have focused on either Sula as a scapegoat for the community, Morrison's use of race, gender, and sexual themes, or the characterizations throughout the novel. The literary criticism of The Bluest Eye has mainly focused on issues of race, class, and gender and the effects that these issues have upon black and white societies in America. Although these themes warrant the attention that has been given them, little or no focus has been given to the prevalence of color symbolism that Morrison employs in both novels. Therefore, this paper will attempt to provide a focus on color symbolism that has not been explored in other literary reviews.

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MORRISON'S *SULA* AND *THE BLUEST EYE*

A THESIS

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Writers and poets have employed symbolism and archetypes as writing tools since the earliest records of literature. The manner in which symbols are interpreted in a work can alter the reader's perception and enable him/her to more fully understand the author's intention. Toni Morrison's use of symbolism in Sula and The Bluest Eye, especially archetypal and color symbolism, is an effort to recover the culture that has been lost to Diasporic Africans. Moreover, the color symbolism and symbolic archetypes that Morrison's employs in both novels, but to a greater extent Sula, are a direct reflection of her awareness of the African ancestral heritage and spirituality associated with those colors and archetypes. This use of symbolism enhances the plots and further defines the characters.

Sula recounts the story of an intense friendship between two young African-American girls, Nel Wright and Sula Peace, who live in a black community in Ohio, The Bottom. Morrison describes their friendship as "two throats and one eye and [they] had no price" (Morrison 147). As Nel and Sula become adults, their paths diverge. Nel embraces the conventional life of her mother, marrying Jude right out of high school, raising a family, and becoming a pillar of the community. Sula leaves The Bottom for a period of ten years, during which time she attends college and travels throughout the country. When Sula returns home, she and Nel renew their friendship, but, after Nel finds Sula and Jude together naked, their friendship is abruptly severed. When Sula

becomes gravely ill a few years later, Nel visits her on her deathbed and finally confronts Sula about her sexual encounter with Jude. When she does not receive the answer she wants and is instead greeted with a question about who was right, Nel walks out. Many years later, as Nel walks past the graveyard where Sula is buried, she has an epiphany. She painfully realizes that all that time when she thought that she was missing Jude, it was Sula that she has been missing. Nel mourns the loss of her one true friend.

The Bluest Eye tells the story of an eleven-year old girl named, Pecola, whom Morrison describes as poor, black, and ugly. The story is narrated by Pecola's friend, Claudia, who hates the preference given to blacks who look and act white. Conversely, Pecola idolizes blue eyes and prays nightly for her eyes to turn blue. Pecola is ostracized at school and is ignored and neglected at home. Her father, Cholly, was so brutalized by racism that he finds solace in alcohol and squanders his money on liquor and women. Consequently, Cholly and Pecola's mother, Pauline, frequently engage in verbal and physical combat. Pauline, who internalizes the ugliness associated with blackness, dedicates her love and respect to the little blond-haired, blue-eyed daughter of the rich, white family for whom she works as a servant. One day Cholly rapes Pecola and impregnates her. Shortly thereafter, Pecola approaches fortune teller/holy man Soaphead and begs him to change her eyes to blue. Soaphead deceives Pecola into believing that her eyes will change color. The novel ends with a scene in which Pecola is insane, pregnant with her father's child, and convinced she has blue eyes.

Many of the literary reviews of Sula have focused on either Sula as a scapegoat for the community, or Morrison's use of race, gender, sex, and characterizations. The

literary reviews of The Bluest Eye have primarily focused on issues of race, class, and gender and the effects that these issues have upon black and white societies in America. Although these themes warrant the attention that has been given them, little or no focus has been given to the prevalence of color symbolism that Morrison employs in both novels. Therefore, this paper will attempt to provide a focus on color symbolism that has not been explored in other literary reviews.

While the general focus of this paper will be on Morrison's use of symbolism and archetypes in both novels, the primary focus will be color symbolism because Morrison references colors so deliberately in her novels that an exploration into the meaning of those colors is warranted. The use of colors as symbols contributes to the imagery of the written word and enables the reader to visualize details about the scenery and characters in a literary work. Colors can also be used to illustrate certain aspects of a character's personality and how he/she interacts with others in their surroundings. Colors add style and significance to objects and people.

While everyone is subliminally aware of the effects of certain colors, the meaning of those colors often varies from culture to culture. Morrison incorporates both Western and African interpretations of color in The Bluest Eye and Sula, although her use of color symbolism in Sula is more closely linked to the symbolic meaning of colors assumed by West African cultures. Therefore, reference

s to color symbolism in Sula predominantly reflect the meanings associated with West African cultures, and references to color symbolism in The Bluest Eye are based on the meanings associated with both African and Western cultures.



CHAPTER 2: AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF SYMBOLISM IN TONI  
MORRISON'S SULA

In Toni Morrison's skillful description in the opening chapter of Sula, Morrison implies an absence of color in the nearly abandoned hilltop community that stood above the city of Medallion, ironically called the "Bottom" by its inhabitants. To make room for the new Medallion City Golf Course, the "nightshade and blackberry patches" have been torn from their roots and the beech and pear trees that were once "wonderful to see" are also gone (Morrison 6). Morrison connects this loss with the exodus of black people from the neighborhood. Through Morrison's description of the scene, one can visualize the colors purple, of which the nightshade and blackberry patches are both shades, and green, the color of the beech and pear trees. Purple is an earth associated color used in rituals and for healing purposes in West African cultures. Green symbolizes growth, vitality, fertility, prosperity, fruitfulness, abundance, health and spiritual rejuvenation (Anyiam 46). Without the presence of these two vital colors, the community inevitably falls into a state of abandonment.

Morrison continues to imply an absence of color as she states that the black woman in the flowered dress will no longer be seen doing "a bit of cakewalk, a bit of black bottom, a bit of messing around to the tune of a mouth organ (3). The flowered dress stirs up images of bright colors such as those associated with flower blossoms, the absence of which is a contributing factor to the demise of the "Bottom." The colors that

Morrison does use to describe the scenery as it currently exists are neutral and bland -- the steel [gray] wrecking ball and the khaki work clothes worn by the men who will “pry loose the slats of Reba’s Grill”(4). Gray derives its symbolism from ash, which is used for healing and spiritual cleansing rituals to recreate spiritual balance when spiritual blemish has occurred (Anyiam 47). Khaki or light brown implies genuineness and sincerity (Johnson 2). The items that are connected with these colors are paradoxically linked to their meaning. The steel wrecking ball, instead of being used to spiritually cleanse the community, is used to demolish it. The men prying loose the slats of Reba’s Grill are wearing khaki, a color associated with genuineness, but their actions betray any genuine feeling for the community that they are destroying.

The novel opens with absence and inversion, with an elegiac lament for a community systematically pulled out by its roots and a history of the “nigger joke” that turns things upside down and which gave that community its name, the “Bottom” (Mayberry 520). Morrison further depicts the eradication of the black community when she speaks of the razing of the Time and a Half Pool Hall where the “feet in long tan shoes once pointed down from chair rungs” (Morrison 3). The bottommost part of the body and pointing downward, these stylish male feet become a synecdoche for the entire Community, the part left to speak up for the whole gone missing (Mayberry 520). Tan or light brown implies genuineness or authenticity (Johnson 2). Morrison associates the men in the pool hall with the color tan to emphasize that actual people once occupied the buildings that are being torn down and that real lives are being affected by the destruction

of the Bottom. It appears that Morrison wants to impress the fact that when the black people leave the community, the color goes with them.

This notion is further evidenced in the next chapter when Shadrack, a native of Medallion, returns home from the war. Injured and emotionally unbalanced from shell shock, he is frightened by the colors he encounters in the V.A. Hospital. When he first regained consciousness in the hospital, he sometimes had to be restrained by a straight jacket due to his reaction to certain colors. The red tomatoes, white rice, and brown meat that the nurse with the yellow hair and apple-green uniform delivers frighten him, and he is only soothed by the fact that the food on the tray is balanced by three triangles. In West African cultures, red is used as a symbol of heightened spiritual mood and struggle. In some situations, white symbolizes contact with ancestral spirits, deities, and other unknown spiritual entities such as ghosts (Anyiam 45). Although brown represents solidity (Johnson 2), it enhances all of the other colors (Webster 28). The colors red and white are both associated with spiritual entities and indicate that Shadrack is haunted by the spirits/ghosts of the men he killed and the ones who died alongside him in the war. The color brown intensifies the impact of the spiritual contact. Compartmentalizing the colors on the plate provides Shadrack with a sense of stability.

When Shadrack is released from the hospital, he is frightened to walk on the white pavement and walks on the green grass instead. Green symbolizes spiritual rejuvenation (Anyiam 49). Avoiding the white pavement which conjures up spiritual images, Shadrack walks on the grass which provides him a sense of emotional balance. Later, after he is released from the V.A. hospital and jailed for suspicion of public

drunkenness, Morrison inverts the perception of malevolence and evil that is often associated with the color black and uses it to bolster Shadrack's courage. When, after seeing the reflection of his own black face in the toilet bowl water, he looks at his hands which he been unable to do prior to that moment. When he realizes that his face is black, he is calmed by its color and, although he is far from being emotionally stable, he is able to function on the peripherals of society. Black is used as a stabilizing color that enables Shadrack to no longer be frightened by other colors.

Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, is associated with the color black. The black pocketbook that Eva carries and the black laced-up shoe that she always wears symbolize power. After her husband, BoyBoy, leaves her in the dead of winter with three children, all under the age of five, \$1.65, three beets and five eggs (Morrison 34), Eva does not succumb to the hopelessness of her circumstances. Realizing that she is unable to provide for them in her current state, she leaves her children in the care of a neighbor, Mrs. Suggs: "Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg. First she reclaimed her children, next she gave the surprised Mrs. Suggs a ten-dollar bill, later she started building a house on Carpenter's Road" (34-35). Gradually adding more rooms onto her house, Eva turns it into a boarding house and becomes self-sufficient. Her boarding house provides her with enough income to provide for herself, her daughter, Hannah, and her son, Plum, as well as her granddaughter, Sula, and three adopted boys.

When BoyBoy later returns, he wears a light blue suit, orange shoes, and a straw (yellow) hat, and his girlfriend wears a pea green dress. He attempts to project the image

of prosperity, but pouring yellow lemonade from a green pitcher, Eva “looked at the back of his neck and the set of his shoulders. Underneath all of that shine she saw defeat in the stalk of his neck and the curious tight way he held his shoulders [...]. Knowing that she would hate him long and well filled her with pleasant anticipation” (36). As previously noted, blue represents loyalty and freedom. BoyBoy’s light blue suit, which is a diluted form of blue, alludes to a sense of diminishing freedom and loyalty. Orange is usually positive; however, when it is used negatively, it can be self-indulgent, lazy, and lacking in energy (Webster 16-17). Yellow is sometimes considered a negative color. When this color is used negatively, it can suggest cowardice, jealousy, treason, treachery, and dishonor (19). The combination of yellow and orange betray BoyBoy’s effort to appear prosperous and in control and reveal that he is, in fact, broken and defeated and that he is a coward who is afraid to face Eva alone, so he brings his new woman with him. The green dress worn by the woman that he brings with him signifies jealousy. BoyBoy has no doubt heard about Eva’s new found fortune and is jealous that she has done so well without him. When he returns after being gone for so long, he brings his new woman with him to make Eva jealous. However, Eva is the one in the position of power. She has attained her own level of success and no longer needs BoyBoy, while his success is merely a façade.

Years later, when Eva is all alone in the nursing home, her powerlessness is accentuated by the pink terry cloth house slipper that she wears. Pink is a diluted or watered down version of red, the color of blood, and is considered to be the color of life. Red is stimulating, vital, enthusiastic, energetic and passionate. It is intense and

represents a strong desire to achieve and is related to conquest and success (Webster 15). The pink slippers that Eva wears indicate that she has lost most of her vitality and passion and that her life is nearing its end.

Plum, whose name is associated with the color purple, has two colors connected to him in the novel, black and red, which when mixed together, can render the color purple. Purple is generally associated with spirituality and enlightenment (Johnson 2). Biblically, purple is associated with royalty. Clearly for Eva, Plum is royalty. In Western cultures, purple is associated with inspiration, spirituality, and the sacred. It is associated with selflessness, love, tolerance, and intuitiveness. It enhances the imagination (Webster 24-25). Morrison does not reveal what kind of man Plum was before he returns home from the war addicted to drugs and alcohol. However, associating him with the color purple by means of his name alludes to the kind of person he could have been had he not experienced the horrors of war. Also, Morrison describes Plum as being swaddled in love and constant affection. In Western African Cultures, purple is associated with feminine aspects of life and purple cloths are mostly worn by females (Anyiam 46). Purple is also associated with the African deity Oya, goddess of change and transformation. This analysis of purple foreshadows Plum's inability to assume the responsibility that society expects a man is to assume, and it also evidences the transformation he has undergone during the war and continues to undergo because of his drug addiction.

Eva's last child and only son is named Ralph, and in accord with his nickname but to his detriment, is the "Plum" of her eye. During the hungry first months after BoyBoy

leaves, Plum takes his father's place in bed with Eva while the two sisters sleep on the floor, absorbing so much of his mother's milk that he becomes physically unable to eliminate on his own (Mayberry 524). White derives its symbolism from the white part of egg and also from white clay used in spiritual purification, healing. Black symbolizes an intensified spiritual energy (Anyiam 45). Because Plum consumes too much milk, he receives an adverse outcome to spiritual cleansing. His stool turns from its normal color to black indicating that his body has consumed too much spiritual energy for an infant to manage. To relieve him of the pain of blocked bowels that even castor oil would not assuage, Eva lubricates her middle finger with lard and inserts it into his rectum to loosen his bowels: "Her fingernail snagged what felt like a pebble; she pulled it out and others followed. Plum stopped crying as the black hard stools ricocheted onto the frozen ground (Morrison 34).

Later when Plum is grown and released from the Army, he comes home from the war carrying a black bag, emotionally crippled by the war and resorts to spending his days getting high on drugs. For Plum, black symbolizes fear, weakness and sorrow. When Eva goes into Plum's room and sees the bent spoon, black from cooking dope, the half eaten cherry (red) pie and what she believes to be strawberry (red) crush, but is in fact blood tainted water used for cleaning his needles, she resolves to put him out of his misery. Though she has for years coped grimly with her own suffering, she cannot bear her son's; godlike, she sacrifices him in a baptism of fire. Plum is the son protected but also prevented from growing up by the love of the powerful black matriarch (Mayberry 524). The color red is very prominent in this scene, as though Morrison employs the

color to foreshadow Plum's death by fire, just as she also does in the scene in which Hannah dies by fire.

The colors red, green, and yellow are prominent in the scenes leading up to Hannah's death. The day before she dies, Hannah snaps green beans for dinner to be served with tomatoes (red) and cornbread (yellow) (Morrison 68-69). After she puts the beans on to cook, she takes a nap and has a dream by which Morrison foreshadows Hannah's death by a most symbolic use of the color red. Hannah has a dream that she is a bride, wearing a red bridal gown (73).

The next occurrence of the colors red, green, and yellow takes place the next morning when Hannah takes Eva a breakfast of fried tomatoes (green) and scrambled eggs with the whites left out for good luck and tells her about the dream in which she wears the red bridal gown (74). These three colors are again accentuated when Morrison describes the air all over the Bottom as being "heavy with peeled fruit and boiling vegetables. Everyone in the community is canning fresh corn, tomatoes, string beans, melon rinds" (75) for the upcoming winter.

Although Hannah dreams of wearing a red wedding gown and she dies by fire, she is also connected to the color blue. She is seen wearing a blue dress the day that Eva looks out the window and sees that it has caught on fire. Blue, the color of the sea, symbolizes the attributes of the sea which can be calm and peaceful or turbulent, chaotic, and treacherous. In this case, it symbolizes the chaos that ensues when Hannah's dress catches fire.



When Eva sees Hannah on fire from her window, “she lifted her heavy frame up on her good leg, and with fists and arms smashed the windowpane. Using her stump as a support [...] her good leg as a lever, she threw herself out of the window [...] trying to aim her body toward the flaming, dancing figure, she misses and came crashing some twelve feet from Hannah’s smoke” (75-76). She is found on her stomach cut and bleeding “by the forsythia bushes [yellow] dragging her body through the sweet pea [dark pink] and clover [green] that grew under the forsythia [also yellow] (77). At the hospital, Eva “remembered the wedding dream and recalled that weddings always meant death. And the red gown, well that was the fire, as she should have known” (78). Ironically, Hannah’s flames are put out by her neighbors who throw on her “a tub of water in which tight red tomatoes floated” (76). Morrison utilizes this last image of red to seal Hannah’s fate; she does not survive the fire, dying on the way to the hospital.

Sula, whose last name is Peace, is associated with the color blue. Sula is seen wearing a blue dress as she leaves her best friend Nel’s wedding. One of the attributes of blue is loyalty (Webster 21). As Nel’s one and only friend, Sula illustrates her loyalty to Nel when she and Nel are confronted by four older white boys on the way home from school. These boys had once taunted Nel by “pushing her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face” (Morrison 54). To illustrate that she is not adverse to violence, Sula slashes off the tip of her finger with a knife and tells them, “If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?”(54-55). The (red) blood that flows from Sula’s lacerated finger is associated with a sense of seriousness and readiness for a serious spiritual or political encounter (Anyiam 45). It indicates how strong-willed

Sula is and how far she is willing to go to protect her friend, Nel. Sula's brazen act causes the boys to all run away in fear.

Another attribute of the color blue is peace (Webster 21), and it is highly unlikely that it is a coincidence that Morrison bestows Sula with the last name of Peace, which technically, is not her last name because Hannah was married to Sula's father. Chaos is also an attribute of blue (Johnson 2), and when Sula returns to Medallion ten years after Nel's wedding day, she brings chaos to the town, which is followed by a stabilizing peace as in the calm that comes after the raging turbulence of the sea. Sula's behavior causes the townsfolk to unite themselves in their hatred of her. She infuriates the town. After sleeping with Nel's husband Jude,

[Sula] ditched him for others [...]. And the fury she created in the women of the town was incredible—for she would lay their husbands once and then no more [...]. Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow. So the women, to justify their own judgment, cherished their men more, soothed the pride and vanity Sula had bruised. (Morrison 112-115)

The women are jealous of Sula because she is different from them and has no desire to be like them. When she returns to the Bottom after having been gone for ten years,

she was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. A black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias, foxtails, a black felt hat with veil of net lowered over one eye. In

her right hand was a black purse with a beaded clasp and in her left a red leather traveling case, so small and so charming – no one had seen anything like it ever before, including the mayor’s wife and the music teacher, both of whom had been to Rome. (90)

Morrison dresses Sula in so many different colors to indicate that she is not the same Sula who left the Bottom ten years previously. Black symbolizes an intensified spiritual energy, communion with the ancestral spirits, antiquity, spiritual maturity, and spiritual potency. Pink is associated with female essence of life. It is viewed as red, rendered mild and gentle and, therefore, associated with tenderness, calmness, pleasantness, and sweetness. Yellow symbolizes sanctity, preciousness, royalty, wealth, spiritual vitality, and fertility. Red is a symbol of heightened spiritual and political mood, sacrifice, and struggle (Anyiam 45). In combination, these colors indicate that Sula is now a much more complex character, one that is difficult to categorize.

Sula baffles the members of her community because she has no desire to become one of their comrades: “She came to their church suppers without underwear, bought the steaming platters of food and merely picked at it—relishing nothing, exclaiming over no one’s ribs or cobbler (Morrison 115). The townswomen were also jealous because Sula did not look her age; she still had her girlish figure and all of her teeth. A notoriously negligent mother belligerently accuses her of pushing her son, Teapot, down the steps, and the townsfolk rally behind her against Sula:

Their conviction of Sula’s evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was

identified, they had leave to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst. (117-118)

Ajax, with whom Sula becomes intimate, is the only person who does not ostracize her. The first time that Ajax calls on Sula, he brings her two bottles of milk, and she is enticed by the tint of the bottles against the blue sky. Since she was twelve years old, Sula has been in love/lust with Ajax. When he called her and Nel “pig meat” (50), as they walked past him sitting with a group of men at the Time and a Half Pool Hall, he initiated her first taste of sexual desire:

Ajax, a twenty-one year old pool haunt of sinister beauty [...]. He held a place of envy with men of all ages for his magnificently foul mouth [...] the epithets he chose were dull, even harmless. His reputation was derived from the way he handled the words [...]. So, when he said, “pig meat” as Nel and Sula passed, they guarded their eyes lest someone see their delight. (50)

Because Ajax is truly interested in what Sula has to say, Sula and Ajax connect on an intellectual level that she never did with anyone else besides Nel. Sula experiences sex on an emotional level with Ajax that she never reached in all of her encounters with previous sexual partners, which were merely physical and casual. While reaching orgasm during intercourse, she transcends outside her body as she imagines touching Ajax with an ungloved hand. The instruments she uses to reach into his anterior self, progress from a chamois to a nail file/paring knife to a chisel and tap hammer. What she uncovers or

discovers, similarly progresses from black skin to gold leaf to alabaster to loam (Basu 98-99). When Sula “rub[s] real hard,” “scrape[s] away” and “tap[s] away” Ajax’s skin “disappear[s]” or “flake[s] away,” his gold “fall[s] away,” and his alabaster “crack[s]” or “breaks” (Morrison 130). One of the attributes of gold is spiritual purity (Anyiam 49) and alabaster, a shade of white, is associated with spiritual purification rites in Western Africa Cultures (45). Loam, a mixture of soil, sand and silt, is dark gray. Gray derives its symbolism from ash, which is used for healing and spiritual cleansing rituals to recreate spiritual balance when spiritual blemish has occurred (47). In that all of these colors are associated with spirituality, they indicate that Sula is attempting to make a deep spiritual connection with Ajax during intercourse, which is a spiritual experience.

For the first time in Sula’s life, she has a desire to be in a committed relationship with a man. Unfortunately, Ajax is not the kind of man who wants to settle down. In fact, what attracts him to Sula in the first place is her independent and carefree lifestyle. When he sees Sula wearing a green ribbon in her hair, he detects “the scent of the nest” and later “[makes] love to her with the steadiness and the intensity of a man about to leave for Dayton” (Morrison 134). When Sula puts on the green ribbon, she becomes like Nel, passive, domesticated and uninteresting. Green in this instance is associated with fertility and fruitfulness (Anyiam 46). For Ajax, this means children, domesticity, and loss of freedom. Ajax was perfectly content to stay with Sula, as long as he felt that she never expected him to stay. His greatest passion is for airplanes, which, of course, symbolize freedom and departure.

Ajax is connected to the chaos and freedom of sky blue. As mentioned before, Ajax enticed Sula with two milk bottles that he holds up to her like a trophy, “framed by a slick blue sky ” (Morrison 124). Ajax suspects that Sula is one of the two women he knows, the other being his mother, “whose life was her own, who could deal with life efficiently and who was not interested in nailing him” (127). Thus, his offering to her is not the milk itself but the clean lines and aesthetic solidarity of the bottles. Ajax is, depending upon one’s perspective, either outlaw or free man, rebel or victim; he is certainly like Sula, the artist seeking his form (Mayberry 527). Like Sula, Ajax has limited ties with community. Also like Sula, he is curious, and fearless and adventuresome, and in the process of finding and knowing, he is also making himself. Morrison expresses Ajax’s curiosity, sense of adventure, and need for freedom in his fascination with airplanes, the sky-blue form of transportation (527).

Even more than by planes, however, Ajax is enchanted by his mother, an “evil conjure woman,” drawing his own artistic power from the feminine. His kindness to women in general is a habit he acquires from dealing with a mother who inspires thoughtfulness and generosity in her sons. Morrison depicts Ajax as understanding more about women than Sula or Nel do about men. It is Ajax who recognizes that Nel is seeking her own “misery” through Jude; it is Ajax who listens to Sula more than he speaks. Unlike Jude, who uses Nel to complete him, and unlike Nel and Sula, who complete each other, Ajax is whole within himself. He is able to connect, yet be separate. His complex wholeness invites Sula’s attraction and respect (528-29).

After Ajax leaves, Sula looks for traces “that he had ever been there,” but finds only his driver’s license, which lists his real name, Albert Jacks, a name with which Sula was never familiar. She realizes that she never really knew Ajax and crawls into bed and dreams of cobalt blue. Blue is associated with love related ideas, and it has also been associated with melancholy, as in “feeling blue” (Webster 22). Sula is clearly depressed because Ajax left without warning, and her dream of cobalt blue is symbolic of her depression. Shortly thereafter, she literally grieves herself to death over Ajax; she becomes gravely ill and dies.

After Sula’s death, the community returns to its original state of disunity. While Sula was alive, negligent mothers like Teapot’s began to care for their children because of their hatred of Sula. But “mothers who had defended their children from Sula’s malevolence now had nothing to rub up against” (Morrison 153). Also, “daughters who had complained bitterly about the responsibilities of taking care of their mothers-in-law had altered when Sula locked Eva away,” but with Sula dead, “they returned to a steeping resentment of the burdens of old people” (153-54).

After Jude leaves Nel, she has no idea what she will do with herself. As she sits on her bathroom floor and tries to cry, the image of mud shifting, leaves stirring and the smell of overripe green things” comes in her head, but the tears do not come (108). The grey mud, shifting leaves, and overripe green things are symbolic that the emotions that Nel has been suppressing are trying to surface and the time to deal with them is long overdue. Nel is merely going through the motions of the betrayed and abandoned wife because she knows that is the role that she is expected to play. However, deep down she

is not really in pain because Jude was never able to fill the void that was left inside her when Sula left town after her wedding. While Nel completes Jude, making “one Jude,” she has given up too much of herself to do so. The marriage is never one in which she is allowed to grow and find personal fulfillment. Being married to Jude amounted to no more than caring for another child, and they already have three. With Jude gone, there is one less child to care for.

Nel Wright, who becomes Nel Green when she marries Jude, is associated with the color green. Some of the attributes of green are fertility and domesticity (Anyiam 46). It is Nel’s nurturing spirit that attracts Jude. She comforts him and tells him everything will be all right. When Nel marries Jude, they have three children, and she works hard to make a comfortable home for them. She cooks, sews, plants flowers, and maintains a nurturing household. Even though at age ten she asserts her autonomy, saying, “I’m me, Me,” and prays ‘Oh Jesus, make me wonderful” (Morrison 28-29), she grows up to be a replica of her passive mother, Helene:

Except for an occasional leadership role with Sula, [Nel] had no aggression. Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had. Only with Sula did that quality have free reign, but their friendship was so close they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one’s thoughts from the other’s [...]. Nel’s response to Jude’s shame and anger selected her away from Sula. And greater than their friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly. (83-84)



Nel is very protective of Jude's sense of pride and manhood. Jude fulfills Nel's need to nurture, but he takes from her and gives her nothing in return. She loses herself in him. Her identity is entirely tied up in her role as a wife and mother. Jude's motivation for marriage had been selfishly based from the onset. After being passed over for a job working on the New River Road to which preference was given to the "thin-armed white boys from the Virginia hills and the bull-necked Greeks and Italians [...], Jude needed some of his appetites filled" (82). Therefore,

he chose the girl who had always been kind, who had never seemed hell bent to marry, who made the whole venture seem like his idea, his conquest. The more he thought about marriage, the more attractive it became. Whatever his fortune, whatever the cut of his garment, there would always be the hem—the tuck and fold that hid the raveling edges; a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up [...]. Without that someone he was a waiter hanging around a kitchen like a woman. With her he was a head of a household [...]. The two of them would make one Jude. (82-83)

Jude Green is associated with the color green, displaying its attribute of envy. Here again Morrison employs the ironical use of color as a representation of a character's name as well as a personality trait. Jude is a black male, with a name the color of green money, and he is envious of the power that it brings to the white male. Green also represents naiveté (Webster 20), and, in this case, green is used to suggest Jude's naiveté

because he assumes marriage will make him a man. True to his name Jude, a derivative of Judas, he betrays his wife and children.

Because Jude has not touched the borders of his own life either, and has not freed himself to create his own order, he is easily threatened and has everything to prove. “Abundant signs betray his tentative masculine individuality, his dependence on the group, his lack of self-control. ‘Well liked’ by the Community, he is the tenor of the Mount Zion’s Men’s Quartet; his job waiting tables at the Hotel Medallion is a ‘blessing’ to his parents and siblings.” Jude longs to exchange his thin-soled shoes and “woman’s work” for the physical demands and camaraderie of the road men, he wants to help build the New River Road and not merely travel on it. “When his hurt at having his labor rejected in favor of the thin-armed white boys turns into shame and rage, he turns to marriage with a pliant and nurturing Nel as a means of proving his manhood” (Mayberry 526).

“Marriage for Jude and Nel is mutually self-denying. Through Jude, Nel acquires vicarious pain” (Mayberry 526). With Nel, Jude is “head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of necessity” (Morrison 83). Perhaps Jude sleeps with Sula and subsequently leaves Nel because he is simply not whole enough to be a real partner for anyone. He is threatened by difference or disapproval. “Just the requirements of staying in the house and having to apologize to his wife are too much for him” (Mayberry 527).

While Morrison associates the color yellow with sexuality and vitality, green suggests degrees of order: from the male nurse in the “apple green suit” who confines Shadrack, to the “green pitcher” containing the yellow lemonade Eva serves to BoyBoy

upon his return visit, to Boy Boy's trophy woman in her "pea-green dress" leaning against the smallest pear tree as she waits for him outside, to the green silk ribbon that signals to Ajax Sula's newfound feelings of possession towards him, to the shabby green coat Nel wears as she turns to leave Sula for the last time thinking how much her old friend has cost her (526).

When Nel goes outside, she notices that the lilac bushes, which should have bloomed by now, have failed to do so. The color purple is missing from her home and is replaced with a gray ball of fur that sits "just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view" (108). Purple is associated with feminine aspects of life and symbolizes sensuality, spirituality, creativity, and enlightenment (Anyiam 46). Gray in this case symbolizes decay and mourning (Johnson 2), the decay of Nel's marriage and her mourning for her loss of her friendship with Sula. This gray ball defies the laws of gravity and follows Nel for some twenty-eight years and does not go away until the day that Nel acknowledges how much Sula's friendship means to her (Bergenholtz 96).

Nel devotes the rest of her youthful years to loving and caring for her children: "But it was a love that, like a pan of syrup kept too long on the stove, had cooked out, leaving only its odor and a hard, sweet sludge, impossible to scrape off. For the mouths of her children quickly forgot the taste of her nipples, and years ago they had begun to look past her face into the nearest stretch of sky" (Morrison 165).

After her children leave home, Nel devotes her time to the charitable work of her Churchwomen's group. Nel wears a green overcoat when she goes to visit the gravely ill Sula. This green has the attribute of envy (Johnson 2). Nel is envious of Sula's ability to

act without inhibitions and without caring what other people think about her. She is also envious of the carefree life that Sula has led and the fact that she left Medallion for ten years and attended college and travelled all around the United States. Green also represents containment (2) and even though Nel once dreamed of taking other trips like the long train ride that she and her mother took to attend her great-grandmother's funeral in New Orleans, she never leaves Medallion again.

### CHAPTER 3: AN AFRICAN CENTERED READING OF SULA

In “African Tradition in Toni Morrison’s Sula,” Vashti Crutcher Lewis quotes Sterling Plumpp as stating that most critics stress the need for black writers to use black writing as a vehicle for teaching and that they are most comfortable when black writers depict black people positively. Plumpp concludes that since Sula is “written according to none of these recipes; it is too complex and mature a book to be classified” (Lewis 91). Sula, a complicated and paradoxical character with as many perceived negative attributes as redeeming ones, clearly does not represent the traditional kind of heroine that most critics expect from black writers, particularly in 1974 when the book was first published. Plumpp concludes that the reason Sula is too complex to be classified is because Toni Morrison writes from an African point of view, an African aesthetic (91).

Agreeing with Plumpp, Lewis adds that Sula is Morrison’s most complex work in reference to traditional African culture. Lewis maintains that this is due to the fact that Morrison weaves the African presence and cultural rootedness into Black American culture without contrivance and with such extraordinary subtlety that neither the characters nor the reader are immediately aware of it (91).

In “Women Who Know Things: African Epistemologies, Ecocriticism, and Female Spiritual Authority in the Novels of Toni Morrison,” Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie states that “Morrison sculpts spiritual landscapes emblematic of Yoruba, Kongo and various African spiritual systems to imbue her work with sacred features to

simultaneously recover ancestral memory and engender the individual's and community's future endeavors" (38). Zauditu-Selassie maintains that "by connecting Africa with America, African people have extended its geo-political boundaries, fortified the transported spiritual culture, and sustained the inter-spatial self and the collective self which characterize African identity." She also states that "Morrison reiterates these ideas in her literary figurations" (39).

Zauditu-Selassie provides insight into Morrison's imaginative inscription and incorporation of "indigenous knowledge, which allow characters to gain meaning in their respective literary environments" (40). She states that "Morrison mediates the distance between African belief systems and western hemispheric realities of Africans in America by employing symbolic codes reflective of African traditional religions and indigenous epistemes, which cohere to African notions of time with its accompanying concepts of causality, unity, and origins" (40).

In a 1988 Présence Africaine interview between Morrison and Christiana Davis, Morrison insists, "There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours" (qtd. in Zauditu-Selassie 39). This statement supports the thesis that Morrison deliberately uses African symbolism in Sula in an effort to recover the culture that has been lost to Diasporic Africans. Morrison utilizes color symbolism that invokes associations with African deities by connecting characters with a color(s) associated with a specific African deity.

In The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism, Georgene Bess Montgomery uses Ifá, an ancient African spiritual system, to examine the spirituality in the texts of African/African Diaspora writers in an effort to extend and enrich the interpretations and readings of these texts. Montgomery states that the more that she immersed herself into learning about the religion, the more that she became aware of how prevalent the tenets of Ifá are in systems of thought and how they permeate the lives of African peoples (1).

Montgomery explains that while diasporic Africans have been cut off from their memories of their African heritage, they still have a recognition of certain images, symbols, and ideas, although this recognition may sometimes be vague and unclear. This recognition is passed down from generation to generation through stories and experiences, through what has been referred to as the “collective unconsciousness,” “blood memory,” or “deepwell memory.” Montgomery elucidates that “this deepwell memory may evidence itself in what many today consider to be superstitions or old wives tales” (Montgomery 14).

Montgomery also notes how similar Ifá is to notions, practices, and attitudes that exist in her community that have been passed down for generations. This awareness led Montgomery to recognize references to Ifá throughout the literature of African-American and Caribbean writers. Her knowledge of Ifá provides her with a significantly different and substantially more meaningful way of interpreting the symbols and ideas in texts whose meanings had heretofore remained obscure. Montgomery subsequently applied

her approach to several mainstream movies and sitcoms uncovering an entirely new level of analysis in them as well (1-2).

Montgomery discovers that as she explores the various paradigms for literary criticism, a method to apply to African-American and Caribbean literary texts that would facilitate and validate her particular reading of the texts is missing from the existing paradigms. She searches for a specific paradigm that will serve to elucidate the many images, symbols, numbers, and colors employed in various African-American and Caribbean literary texts and is unable to find one (2-3). Montgomery feels that the reason there is a lack of criticism that examine the spirituality in texts of African-American people is that many scholars pay little attention to the spirituality embedded in those texts “because their approach to, definition of, and paradigm for spirituality is Western oriented.” African Spirituality is often misunderstood and/or consequently unrecognized (3).

At this point, Montgomery determines to heed Henry Louis Gates directive that African-American critics “must redefine theory itself with our own black cultures” and seek to construct a new theory derived “from the black tradition itself [...] [including] the language of [spirituality] [...] which make the black tradition our own (qtd. in Montgomery 3). Accordingly, Montgomery creates a new theory which she dubs the Ifá Paradigm, a methodology informed by the ideas and world view of the Ancient African Spiritual System, Ifá to unlock deeper levels of meaning in the writings of African peoples (3).



Montgomery explains that Ifá is an ancient spiritual system of cosmology, worldview, and philosophy that involves a complex combination of theology and ritual that emphasizes the inherent connection between all living and nonliving things. This spiritual system involves the belief in one God, and the Prophet Òrúnmílá, who witnessed the creation of the world, and who was given the gift of divination. In addition to the Supreme Being, there are secondary divinities called deities or Òrìsà, energies that represent various aspects of the Supreme Being and are manifested through nature. Each Òrìsà is associated with a particular number and color(s) and has certain characteristics and personality traits (8-9). Montgomery uses the paradigm to “examine ways in which the Òrìsà, the ancestors, colors, numbers, conjurers, conjuring, divination, initiation, ritual, magic are manifested in Caribbean and African-American literary texts and demonstrate how to identify and decode signs and symbols central to Ifá in the texts” (4). For example, by analyzing the colors and characteristics that are associated with certain characters in African-American and Caribbean texts, Montgomery was able to make a connection between the characters and certain Ifá Òrìsà. The following pages contain an application of Montgomery’s Ifá paradigm to some of the characters of Sula.

Sula is seen wearing a blue dress as she leaves Nel’s wedding reception and the Bottom for a period of ten years. The color blue connects Sula to water, and the tadpole shaped birthmark over one of her eyes reinforces that connection. This connection links her to the Ifá Òrìsà, Osun, Goddess of the River. The color yellow is also associated with Osun, and Sula wears a yellow dress when she goes to visit Nel for the first time after returning to Medallion. Osun is beautiful, sensuous, and guided by her feelings (Neimark

142-144). Morrison describes Sula, at age twelve, as someone “who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes” (Morrison 53). Morrison dresses Sula in yellow upon her return as an indication that Sula’s behavior will now be directed by her feelings. Because of the influence of Osun, she does not feel that she is doing anything wrong when she sleeps with her best friend Nel’s husband. She feels that they had always shared everything else, so why should Jude be any different:

She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude. They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other.

Marriage, apparently, had changed all that, but having had no intimate knowledge of marriage [...], she was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to. (119)

Osun is also deity of sexuality, an attribute that influences Sula’s attitude towards sex. While most observers view Sula’s behavior as promiscuous, she is merely acting in harmony with the influence of Osun’s nature. For Sula, the act of sexual intercourse is a natural culmination of her sexual impulses.

As the one woman whom the whole town felt united in hating, Sula provides a perfect scapegoat. As the townspeople cast their sins and faults onto her image, they found an inner peace that allowed them to be kind and loving to one another (Shute 18): “Their conviction of Sula’s evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children,

repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst” (Morrison 117-118). They are bound by “the most magnificent hatred they had ever known” (173).

Regarding the community’s reaction to Sula’s death, Morrison writes that “the death of Sula Peace was the best news folks up in the Bottom had had since the promise of work at the tunnel” (150). Osun’s tendency to take offense easily exhibits itself in many ways. Ridicule, disdain, or lack of respect can bring about a fury and anger that will seep away all that stand in her way (Neimark 142-144). That Osun is not pleased by the people’s rejoicing over Sula’s death is evidenced by the freezing rain that sets in, with ice covering everything:

For days on end, they were virtually housebound, venturing out only to coal-bins or right next door for the trading of vital foodstuffs [...].

Women could not make it down the icy slopes and therefore missed days of wages they sorely needed [...]. By the time the ice began to melt [...] everyone under fifteen had croup, or scarlet fever, and those over had chilblains, rheumatism, pleurisy, earache and a world of other ailments.

(152-153)

The “mourners” at Sula’s funeral sing “Shall We Gather at the River,” invoking the spirit of Osun, the river deity. This song is particularly fitting because it foreshadows the many deaths that will later take place at the river (Shute 14) and suggests Osun’s involvement in their death. Furthermore, the song links Sula’s death to the death of the community, suggesting that she was not only a scapegoat for the townspeople, but was

also their lifeline (18). Osun is also connected to healing, and Sula's presence helps to heal the Community.

As Sula lies dying, she imagines her body floating "over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down until she meets a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always" (Morrison 149). Morrison connects Sula to Shadrack as she depicts one of Sula's last recollections as being the word Shadrack uttered to her when she visited his house as a child, "Always" (62). Sula's awareness of her eternal home in the water is yet another indication that she is a child of Osun.

When Nel accompanies her mother, Helene, to New Orleans to bury Helene's grandmother, Cecile, she meets her grandmother, Rochelle. Rochelle is dressed in a canary yellow dress, an indication that she is also a child of Osun, the deity of sexuality. This attribute manifests itself in Rochelle in her selection of an occupation. The tiny, soft Rochelle works as a whore, both by choice and in reaction to her mother's Catholic repressions (Mayberry 523). Rochelle's rebellion towards her mother's strict upbringing and career choice indicates that she is guided by her feelings, which is one of Osun's personality traits. Rochelle lives her life with little regard for anyone other than herself and is associated with bright colors, beautiful smells, and the freedom of flight.

Although the color blue is not explicitly used in association with Shadrack, it is implied through his affinity with fish and water. Appropriately, Shadrack is the first major character to be introduced in the novel. He is Sula's ancestral presence, a representation of an ancestral spirit, a husband, a father, a provider dispensed by the gods

to “always” be there for the displaced Sula. Shadrack is the presiding river spirit for the displaced African people in the Bottom (Lewis 91). Shadrack lives at the river’s edge and sells the fish that he catches to the townsfolk to support himself. His outwardly dilapidated, but inwardly immaculate cabin, is a metaphor for his state of being, and his sensual attention to the delicate rituals of fishing is his method of healing his psyche, which was wounded in the war, in addition to his institution of Suicide Day. Morrison’s use of fishing is also a way to emphasize Shadrack’s connection to Sula, who is associated with water. In the V.A. Hospital, Shadrack is able to hold himself together only by dreaming of soft voices and a river full of fish (Mayberry 530). Because fish are Osun’s divine messengers, Shadrack, like Sula should be considered as a child of Osun (Neimark 143). He keeps Sula’s purple and white sash, two colors when mixed make blue.

Shadrack also has a sensitive and artistic nature, which is another of Osun’s traits (143). Even in the midst of dirty, gray explosions during the war, he wonders at the purity and whiteness of his cold breath (Morrison 8). Because they are both children of Osun, Shadrack correctly perceives that the birthmark above Sula’s eye is a tadpole: “She had a tadpole over her eye (that was how he knew she was a friend) she had the mark of the fish he loved” (156). When Chicken Little slips from Sula’s grasp and falls into the river but fails to reappear, Sula and Nel fear that someone saw what happened because when they looked across the river, “a figure appeared briefly on the opposite shore (61) where Shadrack’s is the only house located there. It is significant that is Shadrack who saw what happened to Chicken Little and not someone else because of his spiritual

connection to Sula. He understands Sula and will protect her and will not judge her as the other members of the community would. Some critics view Chicken Little's drowning as a sacrificial offering to Osun.

Sula musters the courage to enter Shadrack's house to discover what, if anything, he saw. Sula is startled when Shadrack approaches her, but she is not afraid of him, even though he has been labeled by the townsfolk as "terrible Shad" (61). As she looks at him, she sees "his hand resting upon the door frame. His fingers, barely touching the wood, were arranged in a graceful arc. Relieved and encouraged (no one with hands like that, no one with fingers that curved around wood so tenderly could kill her), she walked past him out of the door" (62). Sula intuitively recognizes the connection that she and Shadrack share, which is the spirit of protectiveness that he has towards her.

The purple and white sash from Sula's dress that she leaves behind in his cottage, Shadrack hangs on a nail and treasures it as a lasting memento a "sign of a visitor, his only one" (157). Their spiritual connection having been made, Shadrack holds on to the memory of his encounter with Sula as a solace for his loneliness: "And after a while he is able to connect the belt with the face, the tadpole-over-the-eye-face that he sometimes saw up in the Bottom. His visitor, his company, his guest, his social life, his woman, his daughter, his friend – they all hung there on a nail near his bed" (157).

Like Sula, who is buried as a witch, Shadrack's gift to the Community is to provide a scapegoat for their destructive fear and lead them to freedom from it. When Sula dies, desperation sets in among the people of the bottom and even Shadrack loses

hope (Mayberry 531-532). While raking leaves at Hodges Funeral Home, Shadrack goes to the cellar looking for baskets and sees Sula's dead body:

It was then that he began to suspect that all those years of rope hauling and bell ringing were never going to do any good. He might as well sit forever on his riverbank and stare out of the window at the moon. By his day-slashed calendar he knew that tomorrow was the day. And for the first time he did not want to go. He wanted to stay with the purple and white belt. Not go. Not go. Still, when the day brok in an incredible splash of sun, he gathered his things. (Morrison 159)

“In their desperation, the people finally heed Shadrack's Suicide Day call, but do so, ironically, in Sula's voice, freeing themselves briefly from the weight of adult pain and fear to laugh at death and embrace chaos” (Mayberry 532). Many of them are drowned by freezing water when the tunnel that they attempt to destroy collapses over them. The people's death by the freezing water of the river can also be attributed to punishment by the angry Osun for their treatment of her child, Sula. Osun, the deity of the sea, demonstrates the treacherous and tumultuous attributes of the sea with the deaths of the people who join in with Shadrack for the Suicide Day Parade.

The color green connects Nel to the Ifá Òrìsà Ogun. One Yoruba tale accounts how Ogun misinterprets the behavior of humans as rude or disrespectful, and as a result slaughters them only to later realize later that he is mistaken. Overcome with remorse, Ogun falls upon his sword and is received into the earth (Neimark 88-89). Nel severs all connection with Sula after she discovers Jude and Sula together naked. It is only when

Sula is on her deathbed that she goes to see her, and even then, she has not forgiven her. It is more than twenty-five years before the remorse for her loss of Sula sets in.

Children of Ogun “have a profound sense of right and wrong, are quick to take offense, enjoy physical things, prefer small groups to large crowds, prefer to do rather than talk about doing, find that others expect them to do things for them, have trouble sharing their personal feeling and get ‘fuzzy-headed’ over the opposite sex” (84). As a young girl Nel has most of these qualities but as a result of years of being scolded, disciplined, or put down for reacting, Nel learns to repress her primary energy source. Ogun is the Òrìsà of iron and metals and the creator with it (87-89):

A famous Ogun tale explains how Ogun had tired of everyone’s constant demands and left civilization for the forest. Without his tools and metals, civilization came to a halt. All other Òrìsà pleaded with him to return [...] to no avail. Finally Osun, the Òrìsà of sexual love and money, took her five scarves and pot of honey and went near to where Ogun was hiding. [...] she began a sensuous dance with her scarves while occasionally dipping into her honey pot and placing the nectar on her shiny lips. Ogun was transfixed. Slowly he crept form his hiding place [...]. Osun pretended not to notice him and continued her dance. Closer and closer he crept, until he was just inches away [...]. It was then that Osun reached into her honey pot and spread honey on Ogun’s lips. [...] Ogun, forgetting his determination, followed Osun back to civilization, and life for the people of Earth could once again progress. (90-91).



Just as Ogun retreats because he is offended, Nel also retreats from Sula when she becomes offended by Sula's involvement with Jude. Similarly, just as Osun draws Ogun out, Sula also draws Nel out on two occasions. The first occurrence is when she becomes ill, and Nel goes to visit her. The second instance occurs years after Sula's death, when Nel senses her spirit and the years of repressed feelings are drawn out as "a soft ball of fur" (Morrison 174) that for forty years had been floating "just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view" (108) "broke and scattered like dandelions in the breeze" (174). It is then that Nel realizes how much her friendship with Sula means to her.

Because Nel is a mother and nurturer, she could be confused, on the surface at least, as a child of Yemonja (Neimark 86) who is the quintessential mother, the absolute caregiver and nurturer, the selfless protector (118). However, it is Eva who should be identified with the Ifá Òrìsà Yemonja. She makes the ultimate sacrifice for her children after her husband, BoyBoy leaves her, in the dead of winter with three children and very little food. Unable to provide for them, she leaves her children in the care of Mrs. Suggs and returns with one leg (Morrison 34). There were many unconfirmed rumors regarding how Eva lost her leg. The most likely story is that Eva sacrifices her leg by placing it across a train track and allowing a train to amputate it in order to collect a settlement from the train company: "First she reclaimed her children, next she gave the surprised Mrs. Suggs a ten-dollar bill, later she started building a house on Carpenter's Road" (35). She uses the money that she obtains to build a house that she eventually turns into a rooming house that provides her a source of revenue for the rest of her life.

Eva also makes the ultimate sacrifice when she risks her life by throwing herself out of her upstairs bedroom window to save Hannah, whose dress catches fire. When Eva intentionally sets the fire that kills her son, Plum, it can be seen through the protective, nurturing powers of Yemonja as selfless murder because it was done out of love and a desire to protect him from the harmful drugs that he takes. She feels that Plum is reverting back into a baby: “Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time” (71). She tells Hannah that she has recurring dreams of Plum trying to crawl back into her womb and how she feared that one day that it would be true. So in an effort to protect him, Eva recounts:

“I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man.” Eva couldn’t see Hanna clearly for the tears, but she looked up at her anyway and said, by way of apology or explanation or perhaps just by way of neatness, “But I held him close first. Real close. Sweet Plum. My baby boy.” (72)

When Plum wakes up and realizes that Eva was holding him, he responds, “Hey, man. Hey. You holdin’ me, Mama?” (46). Eva sees a glass of red liquid that she think is strawberry crush on Plum’s bedroom floor. Plum tells Eva, “Mamma you so purty. You so purty, Mamma” (47). Eva identifies the red liquid: “She put it to her lips and

discovered it was blood-tainted water” (47). At this point, Eva decides to end Plum’s life.

Like her daughter, Sula, Hannah’s beauty and sensuousness connect her with Osun. The color blue also connects Hannah to Osun, as her dress that catches fire when Eva attempts to save her is blue. A dutiful daughter, Hannah takes care of her mother: “Hannah married a laughing man named Rekus who died when their daughter Sula was about three years old, at which time Hannah moved back into her mother’s big house to take care of it and her mother forever” (41). After his death, “Hannah simply refused to live without the attention of a man” and “had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors. Her flirting was sweet, low and guileless. Without ever a pat of the hair, a rush to change clothes or a quick application of paint, with no gesture whatsoever, she rippled with sex” (42). Although she sleeps with other women’s husbands, Hannah is not a home wrecker. She is not looking for another husband: “What she wanted after Rekus died, and what she succeeded in having more often than not, was some touching every day” (44). Needless to say, her friendships with women are “seldom and short-lived” (44). However, she is kind, caring, and devoted to helping run her mother’s household. She never experienced “slightest confusion about work and responsibilities [...] she would make love to the new groom and wash his wife’s dishes all in an afternoon” (43-44). Later on after she is dead and Sula is sleeping with everyone’s husband, the women make a distinction between the two: “Hannah had been a nuisance, but she was complimenting the women, in a way by wanting their

husbands. Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow” (115).

John Phillip Neimark distinguishes between Yemonja and Osun. Yemonja is the mother figure; Osun is the free spirit. He states that although Yemonja is indeed the quintessential mother, she is not specifically in charge of the act of conception. That particular power is left to her daughter, Osun. Once the conception has taken place and the pregnancy has been completed, Osun’s work is done, and Yemonja often takes over. Neimark explains that according to a long-standing Yoruba tale, Osun loves to conceive and have children but quickly tires of the responsibility of raising them. She, therefore, hands her children over to Yemonja to raise so that she can go on about her own pleasures (Neimark 117). These distinctions designate Eva as a child of Yemonja, and Hannah as a daughter of Osun. Eva not only raises her own three children and allows both Hannah and Plum to continue living with her well into their adulthood, but she takes in other children as well, including three young boys, each one of whom she names Dewey. Moreover, she is surrogate mother to her young newlywed boarders, constantly giving them motherly advice and being lenient when they are unable to pay rent: “She fussed interminably with the bides of the newlywed couples for not getting their men’s supper ready on time; about how to launder shirts, press them, etc.” (Morrison 42). Hannah allows Eva to share the responsibility of raising Sula and her comment that “she loves Sula, but just does not like her” (57 ) is indicative of Osun’s influence on her behavior.

It is ironic that both of Eva's children, Plum and Hannah, die by fire. Because of their deaths by fire along with the predominance of red in the scenes preceding their deaths, one might naturally assume that the Òrìsà Sango the warrior deity is involved as Sango is associated with the color red and with fire and is concerned with truth and justice. He is the defender of the oppressed and exacts vengeance on the unjust (Montgomery 50). Although there is a prevalence of red in the scenes and both Hannah and Plum die as a result of a fire, there is nothing that connects Sango as playing in their death.

Morrison reveals the presence of African folks who know things in the opening sentence of Sula (Zauditu-Selassie 46): "In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood" (Morrison 3). The inclusion of nightshade and blackberry, plants associated with pharmacopoeia used by "root workers" and healers, represents both cultural sign and archeological evidence that members of the community practice African spiritual traditions (46) because root workers and healers who work with plants are products of African cultures.

The women in Sula believe in the power of signs. They see signs in everything connected with Sula, the plague of robins that preceded her return to Medallion, Shadrack tipping an imaginary hat to her as he passes by, and Mr. Finley choking to death on a chicken bone after looking up at Sula. The townspeople manufacture evidence to support their supposition that Sula is evil. They spread rumors that she had never had the usual childhood diseases, never received scars from rough child's play, and had never been

bothered by gnats or mosquitoes. They concurred that the birthmark over her eye was the image of a snake and that she was pure evil.

Described as a woman who knows things, Eva is distressed after Hannah's death for not having recognized the signs that prefigured it. Eva reconstructs the signs, which to the non-African mind may seem anachronistic. The first sign recounted is actually the second. Since time is cyclical within an African frame, that is not having a beginning or end time, the only way to understand it is in relation to events. It is central that Eva reconstructs the events in order of importance ( Zauditu-Selassie 46-47). The narrator says, "The second strange thing was Hannah coming into her room [...] with the "evil wondering" (Morrison 67). That Hannah would question her mother's love is an unforgettable outrage and a major cosmic rupture (Zauditu-Selassie 46-47).

The narrator reports that Eva later recalls the first strange thing:

But, before the second strange thing, there had been the wind, which was the first. The very night before the day Hannah had asked Eva if she had ever loved them, the wind tore over the hills rattling roofs and loosening doors. Everything shook, and although the people were frightened, they thought it meant rain and welcomed it. But the rain never came; the wind just swept through. (Morrison 73)

Yoruba myth tells the story of Oya and Sango. Oya always precedes Sango in battle. The wind, the symbol of Oya, deity of change, portends Hannah's impending death.

Besides being able to portend signs, Eva also has the ability to "see things" not apparent to others (Zauditu-Selassie 47). When Nel goes to visit Eva in the nursing home

near the end of the novel, Eva tells Nel that she saw what happened to Chicken Little. She asks Nel to tell her how she “killed that little boy” (168). Shocked that anyone but she and Sula know about Chicken Little's death, Nel first hesitates and then says, “I didn’t throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula” (168). Eva stuns Nel with her clairvoyance since Nel herself had erased her participation in the event from her memory (Shute 45). Eva is a person who is capable of knowing things through dreams and visions, as is the case with her comments such as “Plum. Sweet Plum. He tells me things” (Morrison 169). African spiritual traditions, the Yoruba, in particular, regard death as a transition from this present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits. Consonant with her understanding of life’s continuation beyond the grave, Eva has the ability to communicate with Plum (Zaudit-Selassie 47).

The signs referenced in the previous paragraphs invoke the spirit of the Oya, the orisa who represents the energy of sudden change (Neimark 127). Oya is connected to the wind, which brings about change. Eva’s relationship with Oya allows her to perceive the signs before Hannah’s death. Oya, deity of the the wind and transformation, announces that there will be change. As guardian between life and death, Oya is also connected to transition. Oya is the gatekeeper to the cemetery and is in charge of opening the gate between Earth and Heaven (128). When Eva is communicating with Plum, even in death it is being done through Oya.

Dreams are scattered throughout the text, particularly in reference to the Peace family: “it was in dreams that the two girls [Sula and Nel] first met [...]. They were solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them

stumbling in Technicolored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream” (Morrison 51). This suggests that the girls have a spiritual connection, which reinforces Morrison’s African connection and bears witness to the African belief that dreams have prophetic significance.

Prior to her setting Plum on fire, Eva is tormented night after night with a reoccurring dream of him trying to crawl back up into her womb. When Hannah asks Eva to tell her the reason why she killed Plum, Eva gives her an account of the dream as a justification for her action: “I’d be laying here at night and he be downstairs in that room, but when I closed my eyes I’d see him [...] six feet tall smilin’ and crawlin’ up the stairs quiet like so I wouldn’t hear and opening the door soft so I wouldn’t hear and he’d be creepin’ to the bed trying to spread my legs tryin to get back up into my womb” (71-72). Shortly after hearing about Eva’s dream, Hannah goes downstairs and dreams “of a wedding in a red bridal gown” (73).

In an application of the Ifá Paradigm to Eduoward Glissant’s The Ripening, Montgomery illustrates how dominant images in the text evidence the African concept of opposites and the notion of balance. She explains that Glissant understands that good and bad are husband and wife, not to be separated and that he also recognizes the value of opposites. He does not choose one over the other but presents each as necessarily balancing out the other. Montgomery maintains that the two major characters in The Ripening, Matthieu and Thael are complete opposites, each needing the other to be complete (Montgomery 41).



In the same way, Morrison juxtaposes Nel and Sula. Morrison frames their relationship by stating they first met “in dreams,” so that when they met face-to-face on the school playground, “they felt the ease and comfort of old friends (Morrison 51). Although different in many ways, their relationship “let them use each other to grow on” (52). Their opposites complement each other:

Nel, who regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread, felt comfortable in it with Sula, who loved it and would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten to twenty minutes at a time – still as dawn. As for Nel, she preferred Sula’s woolly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove, where the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave directions. (29)

Nel expresses how easy it was for her to relate to Sula: “Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself” (95).

Sula’s first afterlife thought concerns Nel. After she realizes that she is dead, she thinks, “Well, I’ll be damned, it didn’t even hurt. Wait’ll I tell Nel” (149). Sula has made her own peace with Nel, in spite of the bitter conversation they exchange just prior to her death (Shute 40).

Years after Sula’s death, Nel is leaving the nursing home after visiting with Eva and passes the cemetery. She stops suddenly, gazes at the top of the trees, and whispers “Sula?” (Morrison 174). The “soft ball of fur” that remained “just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view,” (108) the pain that had been locked inside her for so many years “[breaks] and [scatters] like dandelion spores in the breeze” (174).

Nel realizes that it was Sula's friendship she had missed all along, not Jude's presence: "All that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl," and she lets out "a fine cry – loud and long – but it had on bottom and no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (174). This final cry echoes the deepwell memory, which cannot effectively be explained using ordinary language. Consequently it is fitting that Morrison brings her text to a close with such an emotion that cannot be expressed with mere words.

CHAPTER 4: AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF SYMBOLISM IN TONI  
MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE

Just as Morrison begins the opening passages of Sula with the absence of color, she does the same with The Bluest Eye. However, while the absence of color is implied in Sula, Morrison explicitly expresses the absence of the colors yellow and green in The Bluest Eye. The novel is divided into four sections, titled Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer, with subsections within each season in which Claudia, the young narrator of the novel, reflects on one year of her childhood. Claudia relates to the reader her sense of shame and guilt over the incestuous molestation of her friend, 11-year-old Pecola Breedlove (Mayo 59).

At the novel's opening Claudia states, "Quiet as it is kept, there were no marigolds in the Fall of 1941 [...] our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout, nobody's did. Not even the gardens fronting the lake showed marigolds that year [...] It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds" (Morrison 5).

Yellow is associated with the yoke of an egg and ripe fruits and vegetables, and it symbolizes spiritual vitality, and fertility (Anyiam 45). Morrison begins her novel notating the absence of yellow as an indication that the major characters, specifically Pecola, the young protagonist of the novel, will be lacking in spiritual vitality and

fertility. Claudia states, “We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the Marigolds did not grow” (Morrison 5).

Morrison associates Pecola with the color yellow to indicate that she is the one who lacks spiritual vitality and fertility. The color green also symbolizes fertility, prosperity, fruitfulness, abundance, health and spiritual rejuvenation (Anyiam 46). Claudia’s comment that “no green was going to spring from their seeds” (Morrison 5) is an indicator that those attributes will also be lacking among the characters of the novel. It also foreshadows that the baby with which Pecola is pregnant will not survive.

The colors that Morrison employs in the novel’s prologue reference white people, not African Americans. Prologue One is presented in the form of a child’s *Dick and Jane* primer. In an interview, Morrison says, “I used the primer story, with its picture of a happy family, as a frame acknowledging the outer civilization. The primer with the white children was the way life was presented to the black people” (Shute 10). In later sections, Morrison uses parts of the distorted primer to introduce an ironic contrast between the white family in the primer and the black families in Claudia’s story.

Morrison, alternatively, references the colors red, green, and white several times in the brief primer prologue to describe Dick and Jane’s house and Jane’s dress: “Here is the House. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green and white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress” (Morrison 3). Morrison uses the language of a children’s book to invoke the tension between an overly simplistic model of “white” family life in America, and the story of two very different black families (Shute 10).

White is used in spiritual purification, healing, sanctification rites, and festive occasions. It is used in combination with black, green, gold, or yellow to express spiritual vitality and balance (Anyiam 45). Morrison employs the color white for the white family's house to indicate that they are a balanced and happy family as the prologue indicates. Her utilization of the color green for their house indicates that they are vital and prosperous.

Conversely, at the beginning of the Autumn section of the novel, Claudia describes her family's house as "old, cold and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others are braced in darkness, peopled by mice and roaches" (Morrison 10). Although Morrison paints a grim picture of Claudia's family's home, the fact that it is green reveals that Claudia's family also has an element of prosperity and vitality. Indeed, Claudia's family, the MacTeers, are more prosperous than many of the other African-American members of their community. They own a house large enough to take in a boarder, Mr. Henry Washington. Additionally, when Pecola's father, "that old Dog Breedlove burns up his house, goes upside his wife's head and everybody, as a result is outdoors" (10), Claudia's family also take in Pecola until her family can be reunited.

Note that Morrison uses the colors green and white when referring to Dick and Jane's house and only the color green when referring to the MacTeer's house. It is the combination of the two colors that allows for vitality and balance (Anyiam 45) in the home. With the white family, there is a sense of security as well as prosperity. In later passages of Prologue One, Morrison uses parts of the distorted primer to introduce an ironic contrast. The "pretty house" with the "nice" "laughing" mother, the "big and

strong” father, the children, Dick and Jane, and their dog, cat, and friend are idealized, unrealistic caricatures, unachievable for most humans, unthinkable for oppressed, poor blacks in 1940s America (Shute 10), as in the case of the MacTeers.

Claudia’s family is by no means prosperous in the sense that “Dick and Jane’s” family are prosperous. The fact that they take in a boarder indicates that they need the extra money. Also, when Pecola moves in with them, she must share a bed with Claudia and Freida. The awareness of the possibility of destitution appears to always loom somewhere in the backs of their minds. When Claudia hears her mother state that Pecola and her family were outdoors, Claudia is already very familiar with the concept. She states,

Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life. The threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days. Every possibility of excess was curtailed with it. If somebody ate too much, he could end up outdoors. If somebody used too much coal, he could end up outdoors [...]. To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing. [...] But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one’s own kin outdoors—that was criminal. (Morrison 17)

Claudia is also aware that there is a distinction between being put out and being put outdoors: “If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about on the hem of life” (17).

In the opening paragraphs of the Autumn section, Morrison describes Claudia's neighborhood and introduces their white next-door neighbor, Rosemary Villanucci. The first colors that Morrison introduces in this paragraph are actually implied through a visualization of the items that represent them, the (white) bread and (yellow) butter that Rosemary tauntingly eats inside her father's 1939 Buick. The bread and butter are something the Claudia and her sister Frieda desire but cannot have because Rosemary tells them that they cannot come inside the car with her. White is the color of purity and innocence, and yellow is light-hearted, carefree, and full of the joys of life. Morrison is commenting that Rosemary possesses a purity, innocence, and joyfulness that the black girls, Claudia and Frieda, cannot possess in a society dominated by Euro-Western influenced values and concepts of beauty and worth.

More than they want the bread and butter, Claudia and Frieda "want to poke the arrogance out of the eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she come out of the car [they] will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin" (9). The red mark that Claudia wants to make on Rosemary's skin is blood. As it is the color of blood, red is the color of life. It is intense and has a strong desire to achieve and is related to conquest (Webster 15). In drawing Rosemary's blood, Claudia and Frieda desire to conquer, destroy the life of the thing that makes them lesser, the thing that makes the blond haired white girl beautiful and them not (Morrison 74).

Morrison associates Claudia and Frieda with the color brown. When school starts, they get new brown stockings and brown cod-liver oil. They go along with the adults in the "evening to the gray railroad tracks where [they] fill [brown] burlap sacks

with tiny pieces of [black] coal” (10). Walking back home they “see the great carloads of [gray] slag being dumped red hot and smoking, into the ravine [...]. The dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow. Frieda and I lag behind, staring at the patch of color surrounded by black” (10).

Brown, the color of earth and of Fall, is a grounding color. Brown enhances all of the other colors. It symbolizes good health, hard work, stability, and reward through effort (Webster 28). Unlike in *Sula*, where gray symbolizes decay and mourning for Nel, gray, in this instance symbolizes respect, reverence, stability, and wisdom (Johnson 2). Black symbolizes an intensified spiritual energy and communion with the ancestral spirits (Aniyam 45). Morrison uses the black color of the coal to connect them to their ancestral spirit in this scene in which the children working together with the adults perform a communal ritual of gathering coal, which contributes to their survival through the cold winters in Ohio. It is reminiscent of the kinds of rituals that have gone on for centuries between parents and children. Being associated with the color brown indicates that Claudia and Frieda are stable and hard working, and they will be rewarded for their efforts. The novel is told from the perspective of Claudia as an adult, recalling the incidents of her childhood in such a fashion as to indicate that Claudia has made a success of her life. “Claudia reaches a level of understanding that enables her in later life to articulate, with subtlety, sensitivity and captivating poetry, the constellation of events that lead to the tragedy recounted in *The Bluest Eye*” (Rokonitz 386).

While Pecola is living with the MacTeers, she reveals to Claudia and Freida that she wants to have blue eyes like Shirley Temple. Pecola is ostracized in school and along



with the other members of her family despised by the community. “This, she believes, would change if only she were pretty. Her eyes hold all the terrible things she has seen. Maybe if she had beautiful eyes, her life would be radically different” (Shute 21).

Shortly after coming to live with the MacTeers, Pecola gets her first menstrual period. To escape Mrs. MacTeer’s rantings about the amount of milk Pecola drinks, Freida leads Pecola and Claudia outside to sit on the front porch. Pecola is fond of the blue and white Shirley Temple mug that Freida fills with milk and gives to her along with four (brown) graham crackers on her first night at the MacTeers (Morrison 19). Milk is symbolic of nurturance, “motherly milk” (Shute 18). The combination of the brown crackers and white milk that Freida gives Pecola signify that as long as she is at the MacTeer’s, she will be nurtured and will find stability.

After using the mug for the first time, Pecola takes “every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face (Morrison 23), to gaze incessantly at the blue-eyed symbol of everything she is not (Shute 18). The milk consumption represents Pecola’s effort to consume and become Shirley Temple (Moses 624). Claudia’s narrative of her mother’s tirade about milk precedes the narrative of Pecola’s first menstruation and forms a bridge between childhood and womanhood.

The colors that dominate the scene in which the three girls discover that Pecola is menstruating are green, red, white, and brown. Just prior to going outside, Claudia comments the house smells of Fels Naptha, a brown, heavy duty laundry soap, and mustard greens. While they sit outside, Pecola begins to bleed: “Suddenly Pecola bolted straight up [...]. Blood was running down her legs. Some drops were on the steps. [...] A

brownish-red stain discolored the back of her dress” (Morrison 27). Frieda takes charge and orders Claudia to get some water to wash the blood off the steps; then she hurries inside and back out again and pulls Pecola up by the arm: “They head for the side of the house where the bushes were thick” and pins a sanitary napkin “a white rectangle of cotton” to Pecola’s dress (29). Coincidentally, red, green and white are the colors that are associated with the white family in the Dick and Jane primer. They are used in this scene to indicate that Pecola’s first experience with her monthly period will be met with the nurturing of a loving family, and the color brown is used to represent stability. This scene also foreshadows Pecola’s impending pregnancy, as Morrison takes two occasions during this scene to state that now that she has begun menstruating, she can have a baby.

Morrison frequently associates Pecola with the color yellow. In addition to the marigolds, Morrison also connects Pecola to dandelions. On the way to Yacobowski’s market to buy candy, Pecola admires the strong yellow heads of the dandelions, the flowers nobody wants, the weeds plucked from lawns. Both Pecola and the dandelions are unseen and unwanted (Shute 42): “Hunkie women in black babushkas go into the fields with baskets to pull them up. They do not want the yellow heads, only the jagged leaves. They make dandelion soup. Dandelion wine. Nobody wants the head of the dandelion” (Morrison 47). The yellow part, the unwanted part of the dandelion, is cast aside, just as Pecola, who is associated with the color yellow, is also cast aside by her family, her teachers, and her classmates. At the store Pecola buys Mary Janes, a yellow candy encased in a yellow wrapper. Each has a picture of “little Mary Jane [...]. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking out of her world of clean comfort. [...]. To eat

the candy is to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. Three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane” (50). This passage illustrates Pecola’s obsession with blue eyes and the white definition of ideal beauty.

Morrison prefaces the introduction of the Pecola’s family, the Breedloves, with an excerpt from the distorted primer concerning the green house and the red door. Unlike the house in the primer, the house we view here is not pretty. The Breedloves live in an abandoned storefront. It lacks the green, nurturing quality of the MacTeers’ home. It is cold, unmarked by comforting daily ritual. The Breedloves “fester” rather than live (Shute 19). Morrison describes all of the Breedloves as being uniquely ugly due to the fact that they all believed that they were ugly: “No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly” (Morrison 38). Because they believe that they were ugly, they accept their poverty and their station in life and do not strive to overcome it: “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. [...] And they took the ugliness in their hands threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it” (39).

Morrison associates the colors gray and black with the Breedlove’s home. She describes the sky that provides the backdrop for it as leaden and even though there are other gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it, it does not harmonize with them. Instead, “it foists itself on the eye of the passersby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look

away when they pass it” (33). Inside, the house is described as a “box of peeling gray” (34). There is “a tiny artificial Christmas tree which had been there, decorated and dust-laden, for two years” (35). There is a black coal stove that is described as “the only thing living in the Breedlove’s house. [...] The fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own schemata. In the morning, however, it always saw fit to die” (37). Note that the green Christmas tree is covered with gray dust that covers and suppresses whatever life that the green has to offer. Both gray and black in this case are represented in their negative form.

Pecola’s father, Cholly Breedlove, and mother, Pauline Breedlove, engage in physical combat with one another on a regular basis. These battles always occur after Cholly comes home drunk: “An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how routine, had its own ceremonial close. The tiny, undistinguished days that Mrs. Breedlove lived were identified, grouped, and classed by these quarrels. They gave substance to the minutes and hours otherwise dim and unrecalled. They relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms” (41).

During these episodes, Pecola desires to be invisible, totally without color. She prays, “Please God, [...] Please make me disappear. [...] Little parts of her body faded away. [...] Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. Try as she might she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there in them. All those pictures, all those faces” (45). “This may imply to the reader that she cannot extract herself from the harsh realities of her home. Unable

to grasp the metaphoric significance of her eyes as windows to her soul, Pecola becomes obsessed with their physicality” (Rokonitz 389).

Because she cannot make herself entirely invisible, Pecola concludes that the problem is with her eyes. It is not with her body because when she lies still with her eyes shut, she can feel each part of her body fade away, one by one. Pecola feels that her eyes are the medium by which she sees herself being “ignored or despised at school, by her teachers and classmates alike” (Morrison 45). Pecola deduces that in order to change her present situation in which she is ignored and despised because everyone views her and her entire family as ugly, she must change her eyes:

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sight—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. [...] If she looked, different, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, Why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t say bad things in front of those pretty eyes. (46)

Given that Pecola has been subjected to the Euro-Western concept of beauty, the type of eyes that she considers to be beautiful are blue, the color of eyes that white people value as beautiful. She considers blue eyes to be something wonderful: “Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something so wonderful as that happen would take a long, long, time” (46). Blue denotes confidence and stability (Webster 21). In possessing blue eyes, Pecola hopes to obtain these attributes.

Winter introduces three characters who stand in opposition to the affirmation of black self-esteem that Claudia struggles to find: “Maureen Peel and Geraldine and her son Junior, all of whom have internalized white values with some success. They are cruel and self-centered” (Shute 24). By characterizing green-eyed Maureen as “a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back” (Morrison 62), “Morrison encourages the reader to look more closely at the interwoven history of sexual and racial discrimination encoded in that braided hair. This metaphor establishes a link to the intertwined history of ante-bellum miscegenation and its displacement in post-bellum lynching campaigns” (Gillan 286).

Although she is not white, Maureen Peale with her high-yellow skin, her “patent-leather shoes with buckles [...] fluffy sweaters the color of lemon drops tucked into skirts with pleats so orderly [...] brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff” (Morrison 62), is granted the privileges that come with being white in a racist culture (Wallowitz 40). As stated earlier, the colors associated with Maureen are yellow, which symbolizes vitality and fertility, white, which symbolizes purity, and brown which is a grounding color that enhances all other colors.

Initially, Maureen appears to befriend Claudia and Freida, asking to walk home together with them after school and helping them to stand up for Pecola against a group of boys who are taunting her: “They danced a macabre ballet around the victim,” chanting “Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps nekked” (Morrison 65). The boys are prepared to fight them when first Frieda and then Claudia insist that they leave Pecola

alone. But when Maureen appears, “the boys seemed reluctant to continue under her springtime eyes so wide with interest. They buckled in confusion, not willing to beat up three girls under her watchful gaze. So they listened to a budding male instinct that told them to pretend we were unworthy of their attention” (66-67).

During the walk home, Maureen asks the other girls if they have started their menstrual cycles yet. Neither Frieda nor Claudia have begun menstruating, but after Pecola answers positively to her question, Maureen admits that she has also been menstruating for two months. Pecola asks Maureen what menstruation is for, and Maureen tells her that it is for babies: “Babies need blood when they are inside you, and if you are having a baby, then you don’t menstruate” (70). This conversation about blood, babies, and pregnancy foreshadows Pecola’s impending pregnancy. The color red that is invoked by the image of blood in this scene signifies warning and danger in the same manner as a stop sign or red traffic signal.

Eventually, Maureen begins to ask Pecola some questions that Claudia feels are too personal and invasive. She asks her if she has ever seen a man naked. Pecola replies no but insinuates that her father had been naked in front of her, but she did not look. When Maureen presses Pecola for more details, an angry Claudia comes to her defense and calls Maureen “dog tooth” (71). An argument ensues and ends with Maureen insulting them and running away and while “flying across the street against traffic” (73). She calls them black, implying that because she is not black and they are, they are less significant than she is:

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. The weight of her remark stunned us, and it was a second or two before Frieda and I collected ourselves enough to shout, “Six-finger-dogtooth-meringue pie!” We chanted this most powerful of our arsenal of insults as long as we could see green stems and rabbit fur. (73)

The green socks and the white fur that Maureen wears link her to the image of the happy white family with the green and white house. However, Morrison depicts Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola in black and brown, with “coats draped over their heads, the collars framing the eyebrows like nun’s habits, black garters showing where they bit the tops of brown stockings that barely cover the knees” (73)). This scene leads to a comment by Claudia that lays the foundation for the theme of the novel -- Morrison’s commentary on the effects of racial prejudice on self esteem. Claudia states,

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. [...] What did we lack? Why was it important? [...] And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and us not. (74)



When the girls arrive home, they are greeted by their boarder, Mr. Henry, and informed that their mother is not home and has left a pot of turnip greens simmering on the stove for them turn off. This image of the green turnips reinforces the nurturing quality of the McTeer's home. Mr. Henry gives the girls a quarter to buy ice cream, which they were unable to afford earlier on their walk home when Maureen buys an ice cream cone for herself and Pecola but not Claudia and Frieda, even though she has a whole dollar. The girls go to the store and buy a bag of potato chips and three powerhouse bars and hurry back home to sit and eat them under the lilac bushes. This affords them the opportunity to execute a revenge taunt on Rosemary: "We always did our Candy Dance there so Rosemary could see us and get jealous" (76). The lilac bushes are a shade of purple which, in terms of Western colorology, enhances the imagination.

In a later scene, Pecola has a traumatizing experience with a male version of Maureen in the person of Junior. One day, Junior sees Pecola cross the schoolyard, adjacent to his own backyard. He calls her over and tempts her into his house with the promise that she can see his kitten. Once inside, he hurls the cat at her face. When Pecola sees the black cat with the blue eyes, she is fascinated rather than afraid. The cat's blue eyes signify chaos and foreshadow the chaotic scene that will ensue. Applying the colorology of western cultures, the black color of the cat and its blue eyes signify a combination of negative associations . Black represents evil, the mysterious and unknown. Black cats are generally associated with witches bad and luck. However, where luck is concerned in this case, the cat gets the worst end of the deal: "It was not long before the child discovered the difference in his mother's behavior to himself and

the cat. As he grew older, he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spent happy moments watching it suffer” (86).

Desperate to act out his rage and resenting on some level the cat’s elevated position in the family (Shute 76), Junior begins, to Pecola’s horror, to torture it. When Junior is interrupted by his mother, Geraldine, he blames Pecola for killing the cat. Geraldine recognizes in Pecola everything she has spent her life trying to deny. Furious, she turns on her, “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison 92).

The characters of Maureen Peale and Geraldine represent Morrison’s critique of internalized racism. Both characters recognize the privileges that come with looking and acting white and, as a result, learn to hate all that was black, all of the funk that associates them with their culture: “That laugh that is a little too loud; the enunciation a little too round; the gesture a little too generous” (83).

Spring, the next section of the book, represents new life and resurrection and is associated with the color green. Green is prevalent in the opening paragraph in which Claudia describes how whippings with the green switches of spring differ from the brown straps her parents used in the winter. She lies on the green grass, listening to her mother singing as she cleans. When Claudia goes to find Frieda, she discovers her crying in her room because their father has beaten up Mr. Henry. Mr. Henry had “picked” at her (99). As a result, Freida thinks that she is now ruined like the prostitutes who live upstairs from Pecola. She concludes that being ruined makes you fat, and she must start drinking whiskey to keep from getting fat.

Frieda and Claudia go to visit Pecola to see if she can get them some whiskey from Cholly because he “is always drunk” (102). They learn from one of the prostitutes upstairs that Pecola has gone to her mother’s workplace and decide to go there to find her. Pauline works for a white family who owns a big white house by a lake. As the girls walk to the house, they notice how the scenery changes as they leave the black neighborhood and enter the white one:

The streets changed; houses looked more sturdy, their paint was newer [...]. Then came brick house set well back from the street [...]. The lakefront houses were the loveliest. [...]. The backyards of these houses fell away in green slopes down to a strip of sand, and then the blue Lake Erie, lapping all the way to Canada. The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. The sky was always blue. (105)

When Pauline is at work at the white family’s house, she feels what it is like “to wear their white skin” to assume the “privileges” of citizenship that such whiteness affords her (Gillan 290). At their house, “she could arrange things, clean things, line things up in neat rows. [...]. Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise” (Morrison 127). With the white house as the standard of beauty, Pauline finds everything in her home decor wanting. Morrison again associates the color gray with the Breedlove’s house when she describes how Pauline contrasts her home with the white family’s for whom she works. Gray, in this instance, is used in the same negative context as it is used in *Sula*. It symbolizes decay and grief for Pauline as she compares her

employer's well cared for, elegant home to her rundown, shabby home. She compares her zinc (gray) tub to her employer's porcelain one, her "stiff, grayish towels" to their "fluffy white" ones, her daughter's "tangled black puffs of rough wool" with the Fisher girl's silky, yellow hair (127).

Morrison uses the color white several times to describe the interior and exterior of the white family's house. Outside there is a white wheelbarrow filled with purple and white crocuses. Inside Pauline is dressed in a white uniform, and her skin glows "like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white woodwork" (107). When Pauline goes downstairs to get the wash, "she disappeared behind a white swinging door" (109).

White is used to represent this white family's house in the same way that it is used with the white family in the Dick and Jane primer.

For the first and only time in the novel, Morrison gives a description of Pecola's clothing. She is wearing a red sweater and a blue cotton dress. Red symbolizes strength, power, and self-confidence, and blue has a calming effect and is associated with truth and sincerity. When Pecola sees Claudia and Frieda, she is glad to see them and smiles, something that is "a rare thing to see on her" (106). The fact that her mother is allowing her to assist her with her job gives her self-confidence, and she is sincerely happy to be included in the life that her mother leads when she is away from home.

However, while Pauline is downstairs, the little blond-haired girl who lives there comes into the kitchen dressed in pink. Her sudden appearance startles Pecola, causing her to knock a hot blackberry cobbler onto the floor and "most of the juice splashed on Pecola's legs" (108). When Pauline returns and sees Pecola hopping about, she rebukes

her for messing up her floor “and with the back of her hand knock[s] her to the floor” (109) where she slides into the pie juice, then she yanks her up and slaps her again and tells her to get the wash and get out (109).

Conversely, when Pauline sees that the little white girl is upset by her behavior, she comforts and fusses over her and promises to make her another pie. When the little girl asks who Pecola and her friends are, Pauline tells her “Don’t worry none baby” (109). Morrison dresses the little white girl in a pink dress and pink slippers to symbolize her innocence because pink is related to femininity and innocence (Webster 26). After Pecola is burned by the purple blackberry juice, a color that symbolizes spirituality and imagination, she is immediately spurned by her mother in favor of the little white girl. This is an indication that Pecola’s spirit has been wounded, and the self-confidence that she had in the beginning of the scene has been shattered like the cobbler.

In the scenes that recount Pauline’s life prior to and up to her marriage to Cholly, the reader is impressed by Pauline’s unusual attraction to colors. Her memories of home are encompassed by “a streak of green” created by iridescent June-bugs (Morrison 112). When Pauline falls in love, it is likened to an explosion of color, mingled with varied textures and tastes: berries, lemonade, June-bugs and yellow eyes fuse together into an intense and tactile experience that merges abstract and physical apprehensions (Rokotnitz 395). She recalls the first time that she saw Cholly:

When I first seed Cholly I want you to know it was like all the bits of color from that time down home when us chil’ren went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of my Sunday dress, and they

mashed up and stained my hips. My whole dress was messed with purple, and it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade Mama used to make when Pap came in out the fields. It be cool and yellowish [...]. And that streak of green the june bugs made on the trees the night we left from down home. All of them colors was in me. (115)

Pauline, we are led to suspect, was born with the kind of sensibility that, were it encouraged, may have been expressed in beauty (Rokotnitz 395). The colors green, yellow, and purple with which she is connected indicate that she was once full of life and spiritually vibrant and imaginative. Now that her marriage has proven disappointing and Cholly is unable to financially provide her with the kind of home that she desires, she reserves all of the beauty that she has inside her for the white family for whom she works.

Morrison's narrative of Cholly's early life divulges how he has been repeatedly stripped of power and self-worth at the hands of whites. Cholly's life consists of many events typical of black experiences in America. Cholly was abandoned when he was four days old and left for dead by his mother. His Great Aunt Jimmy rescues him from "down in the rim of a tire under a soft black Georgia sky" (Morrison 133) and raises him until she dies when Cholly is about fourteen years old. The black tire and the black sky symbolize an intensified spiritual energy, antiquity, spiritual maturity (Anyiam 45). Cholly's life is fashioned by his association with a number of elderly persons. Because Cholly is raised by his great aunt, his life is populated by her friends, a network of elderly

women who assist in nurturing his manhood (Gillan 292). Additionally, Cholly's father-figure is an elderly man named Blue.

After his Aunt Jimmy's funeral, Cholly and his neighbor Darlene take a walk in the woods. While he is engaged in his first sexual experimentation with Darlene, he has an encounter with two white hunters. For their amusement, the hunters force Cholly and Darlene to continue with their sexual intercourse while they shine flashlights on them while taunting them with racial slurs. Before the hunters arrive, Cholly's sexual awakening is described in organic terms (Gillan 292): "His mouth full of the taste of muscadine [...]. The smell of promised rain, pine, and muscadine made him giddy" (Morrison 146). The purple muscadine and green pine signify that Cholly is imaginative and full of life and that he is a free spirit. After the hunters leave, all of this becomes rotten (Gillan 292). Since the young Cholly could not fight two armed men, he turned his rage instead toward Darlene, and, as an adult, toward his family. Marriage marks the end of Cholly's free spiritedness: "The constantness, varietylessness, the sheer weight of sameness drove him to despair and froze his imagination" (Morrison 160).

Coincidentally, just as Pauline stains her white dress with purple berry juice after a funeral, Darlene also stains her white dress with purple muscadine juice following Cholly's Aunt Jimmy's funeral. Purple is associated with inspiration and spirituality (Webster 24). White is the color of purity, innocence, and protection (26) and is used in spiritual purification (Anyiam 45). The purple stain on white indicates a maturation of innocence and imagination. Purple is also the color of the Oya, African deity of change. Oya is also gatekeeper to the cemetery for that gate represents the ultimate transition.

Morrison moves the story back to Cholly's adult life when he returns home drunk one afternoon and watches Pecola as she stands at the sink washing dishes. The position of her foot reminds Cholly of his first meeting with Pauline. Cholly has a myriad of conflicting emotions as he watches Pecola. First, he pities his daughter but despises her for loving him. He wants to please her, while wanting to kill her at the same time. The emotion that he finally acts upon is the unthinkable one for a father to do to his daughter – he rapes her. When Cholly enters her, Pecola faints.

After Cholly climaxes, he stands and notices Pecola's grayish panties. This is the only reference to color that Morrison uses during the entire rape scene. The color gray in this scene symbolizes decay and mourning (Johnson 2), the loss of Pecola's innocence. Pecola awakens afterwards to find her mother standing over her. The sight of Pecola's abused body on the kitchen floor provokes Pauline to beat instead of comfort her daughter.

The Spring section of the novel ends with Pecola's encounter with Soaphead Church, "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (Morrison 165). "People came to him in dread, whispered in dread, wept and pleaded in dread" (173). Soaphead Church, however, whose real name is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, exhibits arrogance and disrespect in the letter he addresses "TO HE WHO GREATLY ENNOBLED HUMAN NATURE BY CREATING IT" (176). Instead of exercising power to do good, he abuses his position to "lead Pecola not to salvation but to damnation, to lies, self-delusion, and madness" (Napieralski 61). Soaphead boasts in his letter to God, "I, I have caused a



miracle. I gave her the eyes. I gave her blue, blue, two blue eyes [...] No one else will see her blue eyes. But she will. And she will live happily ever after” (Morrison 182).

Summer is often considered a time of birth and burgeoning life. For Pecola, summer means death and despair. Pregnant with her father’s child and convinced she has blue eyes, Pecola has become insane (Shute 37). Claudia states, “I even think now that the soil of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year” (Morrison 206). Claudia is able to look “among the garbage [...] of [her] town” and focus, in the novel’s final line, on beauty: “sunflowers” (206). The novel closes with a sense that Claudia has moved on while Pecola remains frozen in time, a child, trapped in the tragic first verse of her own blues, with her imagined blue eyes and the lack and self-loathing they signify (Moses 637), “frozen in the glare of the lover’s inward eye” (Morrison 206). The loving eye is Claudia’s, and The Bluest Eye is Morrison testifying to Pecola’s pain and the community’s shame (Moses 637).

Claudia links strawberries and summer to “dust and lowering skies” (Morrison 187). Claudia expresses the feelings of guilt that she and her sister experience over the death of Pecola’s child and Pecola’s insanity. “Claudia feels that the fact that the seeds they planted do not grow somehow implicates her in the death of the child. She and her sister, like the other members of the community, do not do enough to save Pecola” (Mayo 233).

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison invites an application of a variety of literary theories for both Sula and The Bluest Eye. In writing Sula, Morrison expresses the impact of racism on her characters without making it the central focus of the novel. Additionally, she provides the opportunity for her readers to explore mother-daughter relationships, mother-son relationships, friendships between males and females, female friendships, and the devastating impact of integration. Feminist, Marxist, Archetypal and Biblical theories may easily be applied to Sula.

Morrison provides a plethora of the mother-daughter relationships for analysis in the relationships between Eva and Hannah, Hannah and Sula, Cecile and Rochelle, Rochelle and Helene, and Helene and Nel. Eva and Plum's relationship as well as her relationship with the Deweys, Chicken Little and his mother, and Teapot and his mother's relationship invite an examination of mother-son relationships. Sula's friendship with Shadrack and Ajax, Hannah's relationship with the husbands, and Eva's relationship with the men who frequent the boarding house are examples of male-female relationships that may be explored. Nel and Sula's relationship are the obvious example for studying female relationships, but the relationship between Eva and the young brides who live at her boarding house and the relationship that Nel and Sula have with the women who rally behind Nel and turn against Sula are worth consideration also. The impact of integration is underscored in the gradual obliteration of The Bottom due to the

black people moving as close to the valley as they can when they began to prosper financially, expansion of white neighborhoods, the erection of television towers, and the construction of the Medallion Golf Course (Morrison 165-67).

In critiquing Sula from a feminist stance, Morrison provides an excellent example of a strong independent woman in Sula's grandmother Eva, who achieved financial independence without the aid of a man while retaining her femininity and attractiveness to men. While Sula and her mother Hannah are not financially independent, they are not beholden to a man for their security and do not allow their sexual appetites to become a weapon that men can use to control them. While on the surface it appears that both Nel and her mother Helene gain their identity through their husbands, they retain elements of independence. Helene's husband's work allows him to come home only three out of every sixteen days (17), leaving Helene to carry the responsibility of the upkeep of their household and Nel's upbringing. Nel provides the strength and solidity in her marriage to Jude, which explains why she is able to maintain stability in her family after Jude leaves her.

An application of the Marxist theory to Sula would focus on the community of The Bottom. The community was formed as a result of a cruel joke that was played by a white master on his black slave. The master promised his slave that he would give him freedom and a piece of bottom land but gave him land in the hills instead and told him that it was the bottom of heaven (5). The people of The Bottom exist in a microcosm outside the mainstream of American society. Each morning, they leave The Bottom to go to work in virtual invisibility in the world of the white people who live in the town of

Medallion and return nightly to their own world in *The Bottom*. Sula also sheds light on the vexatious relationship between the Irish immigrants and African Americans in the early twentieth century. The Irish immigrants accepted and perpetuated the stereotype of the African Americans' racial inferiority and gained acceptance in the "White Republic" (Venkatesan 114).

An archetypal approach to Sula would focus on Eva as Earth Mother, Shadrack as Picario, Sula as Siren, and Helene and Nel as Madonna. Shadrack has also been associated with the Dionysus, the Greek god of the vine. In Greek mythology Dionysus is thought mad and, therefore, ignored and even imprisoned, although the doubters pay dearly. Shadrack's reception in the bottom is much the same. When he institutes National Suicide Day, Shadrack is ignored, insulted, and even taunted from afar. Although he lacks any sort of divine power to aid in his retaliation, Shadrack strikes back with words, silencing his opponents with their own secrets (Closser 111).

A Biblical application would connect Sula with the Cain myth. Sula accidentally throws Chicken Little in the Ohio River where he drowns. Like Cain, Sula feels rejected after overhearing her mother tell her friends that she does not like Sula. The rose/tadpole shaped birthmark over her eye is considered a Cain's mark (Jones 616). Shadrack owes his name to the Biblical Shadrack who survived being thrown into a fiery furnace. Eva is a derivative of Eve, Biblical mother of creation, and Jude is a derivative of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus.

An analysis of Sula applying Cultural Studies would focus on Morrison's infusion of African Spirituality into the novel. This inclusion allows the reader to recover the

African cultural heritage that has been lost to the people of the African Diaspora. Sula records the lifestyles of a community of African Americans whose culture and traditions are uniquely their own, uninfluenced by the dominant culture of White Americans who live in the town of Meridian, Ohio.

Morrison also incorporates several underlying themes in The Bluest Eye such as, secondary consciousness, internalized oppression, notions of beauty, and socialization. Secondary consciousness occurs as the characters' consciousness of themselves is informed by their awareness of what others perceive them to be. This self awareness is grounded in their realization that they are continually being compared to an ideal that is impossible for them to achieve. This consciousness leads to internalized oppression in characters like Junior, Cholly, Pauline, and Sammy Breedlove, all of whom have a diminished sense of self-worth. The concept of beauty theme plays throughout the novel in the preference that is given in school to Maureen because of her light skin color, in the white dolls that the girls are given for Christmas presents, and the ideal images of beauty projected in the movies that Pauline frequents and the Shirley Temple movies that the girls watch. The theme of socialization is accentuated in the primer passages that describe the white family and their home, setting the ideal standard that one should aspire to attain. Additionally, historical, feminist, and Marxist theories are applicable to The Bluest Eye.

Morrison's purpose for writing The Bluest Eye is to shed light on the effects that institutionalized racism has on the people being oppressed and the internalization of that oppression. Although her novel concerns a specific group of characters, those characters

are a synecdoche for the entire race of African Americans living during the time that the novel was written. By recording the difficulties in life that Claudia, Pecola, and their families experience, the novel paints a poignant picture of what life was like for African Americans who were struggling to survive in an economic system controlled by their oppressors. This economic struggle is partnered with the struggle for identity amid the cultural values that their oppressors also impose on them. The incorporation of these components makes an excellent case for a historical reading of The Bluest Eye.

A critique of The Bluest Eye using a feminist approach would concentrate on Frieda and to a greater extent Claudia's independent and defiant attitude and their self confidence and pride. An analysis should be made of their awareness of the ideal standard of beauty by which they are judged while not allowing this standard to shape their image of themselves. The relationship between them and their mother would be analyzed to find a connection between this relationship and their worldview and sense of self. A contrast should be made between the difference between how Frieda and Claudia's mother nurtures and reassures them and how Pauline mothers Pecola. An analysis of Junior's mother, Geraldine would also be beneficial to an application of feminist theory.

An application of the Marxist theory to The Bluest Eye would explore the impact of the dominant white society on the oppressed black people of Lorain, Ohio. A comparison of the nice brick homes with big green lawns and pretty flowers of the whites with the shabby homes of the blacks would be examined. The economic inequality between them should be explored. Finally, the discrimination and prejudice that the

blacks receive from the whites and in turn inflict upon one another are also subjects for investigation.

This paper has attempted to fill the void created by the scarcity of critical focus on color symbolism in Morrison's novels. By focusing on the African perspective from which Morrison writes, this paper has examined elements of her works that traditional Western criticism has failed to consider. Color symbolism transcends all cultures and an awareness of colors' meaning is embedded in the collective consciousness of people of all ethnicities. Therefore, it is not felt that Morrison limits her use of color symbolism to either Western or African interpretations, but instead, interchangeably incorporates them both throughout her works. For this reason, interpretation of colors from an African as well as Euro-Western perspective has been employed throughout this paper.

No doubt, there are many other methods of criticism that can be applied to Morrison's works, and while all of these methods allow the reader to obtain a closer reading, none of them address the preponderance of color symbolism found in Morrison's novels. This paper has focused on how Morrison's use of colors as symbols contributes to the imagery of her written word and how it enables the reader to visualize details about the scenery and characters in her works. An examination has been made of how Morrison employs colors to illustrate certain aspects of her character's personality and how they interact with others in their surroundings. It is hoped that the analysis of these works using color symbolism will facilitate a closer reading, if not a deeper understanding of Morrison's novels.

## APPENDIX A

In Jumping the Broom in Style, Thony C. Anyiam provides details on symbolic meaning of colors based on his personal contact with and research on people of West African Cultures. According to Anyiam, the following symbolic meanings of colors are denoted for West African Cultures:

Black derives its significance from the notion that new things get darker while they mature, and physical aging comes with spiritual maturity. The Akans, members of any of the *Akan*-speaking peoples, a Kwa language of southern Ghana and the southeast Ivory Coast such as the Ashanti (*Merriam-Webster*), blacken most of their ritual objects to increase their spiritual potency. Black symbolizes an intensified spiritual energy, communion with the ancestral spirits, antiquity, spiritual maturity, and spiritual potency (Anyiam 45).

White derives its symbolism from the white part of egg and also from white clay used in spiritual purification, healing, sanctification rites, and festive occasions. In some situations it symbolizes contact with ancestral spirits, deities, and other unknown spiritual entities such as ghosts. It is used in combination with black, green, gold, or yellow to express spiritual vitality and balance (45).

Yellow in all its variations is associated with the yoke of an egg, ripe and edible fruits and vegetables, and also with the mineral gold. In some spiritual purification



rituals, mashed yam is rendered yellow with palm oil and served with eggs. It symbolizes sanctity, preciousness, royalty, wealth, spiritual vitality, and fertility (45).

Pink is associated with female essence of life. It is viewed as red rendered mild and gentle and, therefore, associated with tenderness, calmness, pleasantness, and sweetness. According to Akan social thought, these attributes are generally considered as essential aspects of the female essence (45).

Red is associated with a sense of seriousness and readiness for a serious spiritual or political encounter. It is also associated with blood, sacrificial rites, and the shedding of blood. Red is, therefore, used as a symbol of heightened spiritual and political mood, sacrifice, and struggle (45).

Blue is associated with the blue sky, the abode of the Supreme Creator. It is, therefore, used in a variety of ways to symbolize spiritual sanctity, good fortune, peacefulness, harmony, and love-related ideas (46).

Green is associated with vegetation, planting, harvesting, and herbal medicine. Tender green leaves are usually used to sprinkle water during purification rituals. It symbolizes growth, vitality, fertility, prosperity, fruitfulness, abundance, health, and spiritual rejuvenation (46).

Purple is viewed in the same way as maroon. It is considered as an earth-associated color used in rituals and for healing purposes. It is also associated with feminine aspects of life. In Western African Cultures, purple cloths are mostly worn by females (46).

Maroon has a close resemblance to red-brown, the color of soil and which is associated with Mother Earth. Red-brown is usually obtained from clay and is, therefore, associated with healing and the power to repel malevolent spirits (46).

Gray derives its symbolism from ash. Ash is used for healing and spiritual cleansing rituals to recreate spiritual balance when spiritual blemish has occurred. It is also used in rituals for protection against malevolent spirits (47).

Silver is associated with the moon which represents female essence of life. Silver ornaments are usually worn by women and are used in the context of spiritual purification, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, and other community festivals. It symbolizes serenity, purity, and joy (47).

Gold derives its significance from the commercial value and social prestige associated with the precious mineral. Gold dust and gold nuggets were used as medium of exchange and for making valuable royal ornaments. Gold symbolizes royalty, wealth, elegance, high status, supreme quality, glory, and spiritual purity (47).

Richard Webster in Color Magic for Beginners and David Johnson in “Color Psychology” delineate the basic meaning associated with colors adopted by Western Cultures as follows:

Red, the color of blood, is considered to be the color of life. It is stimulating, vital, enthusiastic, energetic, and passionate. It is intense and has a strong desire to achieve and is related to conquest and success. When red is used positively, it is fun-loving, creative, ambitious, persistent, and motivated. It symbolizes strength, power, and self-confidence. When red is used negatively, it is destructive. For example, an angry

person “sees red” and when someone is caught “red-handed,” he/she is committing a crime, as in with blood on his/her hands. The Bible associates red with sin in Isaiah 1:18 and in seventeenth-century New England, adulteresses had to wear a scarlet letter A to intensify their sin and shame. Red symbolizes the blood of Christ for Christians, and the Hebrew people consider red the color of sacrifice and sin (Webster 15-16). Red also symbolizes passion, strength, energy, fire, love, sex, power, danger, war, and anger (Johnson 1).

Yellow is light-hearted, carefree, and full of the joys of life. It is warm, bright, and cheerful and also intellectual, provides hope, and helps people find a sense of direction in their lives. Yellow is always learning and striving for knowledge and wisdom. Yellow is sometimes considered a negative color. When this color is used negatively, it can evidence cowardice, jealousy, treason, treachery, dishonor, and perversion. Medieval artists believed that Judas Iscariot wore yellow robes. Jewish people were made to wear yellow armbands in Nazi Germany, and victims of the Inquisition were also made to wear yellow armbands (Webster 19). Yellow also symbolizes sunlight, joy, happiness, optimism, cowardice, illness, and hope (Johnson 2).

Orange is exciting, assertive, joyful, and persistent. It balances the life-force of red with the lightness and goal-setting qualities of yellow. Orange encourages new ideas and new ways of looking at things. It symbolizes warmth, expansion, prosperity, virility, harvest, tolerance, and love for all life. Orange is usually positive; however, when it is used negatively, it can be sensual, self-indulgent, lazy, and lacking in energy (Webster 16-17).

Green is soothing, restful, and nurturing. It provides balance and restores body, mind, and soul. It is the color of nature and symbolizes growth and abundance. It is also the color of renewal, which relates it to health and longevity. It is also related to calmness, stability, peace, empathy, and contentment. It has always been associated with healing and is hardworking, conscientious, reliable, and sometimes stubborn. As plants are green, green is also believed to symbolize the resurrection (Webster 19-21). Green also symbolizes nature, spring, youth, good luck, envy, containment, and misfortune (Johnson 2). In its negative context, green is associated with jealousy, as in to be “green with envy” or being possessed by the “green-eyed monster.” Green also represents inexperience and naiveté, as in being “green around the gills” or a green-horn (Webster 20).

Blue is the coolest color and has a calming effect. It is associated with truth, sincerity, loyalty, justice, and intelligence. In medieval times, artists considered red to be the color of God, blue to be the color of the Son of God, and consequently of Mary, mother of Jesus, who was always depicted wearing a blue cloak to symbolize her love, loyalty, and devotion. Green was considered to be the color of the Holy Spirit. Businesspeople today frequently wear blue as it denotes confidence and stability. Blue also has some strange connotations. A “blue story” is one that is licentious. “Bluebeard” is a synonym for a murderous husband. Blue has also been associated with melancholy, for example “feeling blue” and “blue Monday,” which is likely where blues music received its name. Someone who is loyal or faithful is true-blue, and the term blue-blood is given to people of high birth. Wearing the traditional “something blue” on her

wedding day protected the bride from evil spirits for the entire marriage. Additionally, people wearing blue were protected from the effect of the evil eye and from witches, as it was believed that blue was the color of heaven, and witches didn't like it (Webster 21-23). Blue also symbolizes seas, unity, calmness, freedom, chaos, confidence, water, ice, loyalty, winter, wisdom, truthfulness, and love (Johnson 2).

Violet and purple are associated with inspiration, spirituality, and the sacred. Violet is selfless, loving, tolerant, and intuitive. It enhances the imagination. The wearing of purple or violet robes by Greek priests at Eleusis, an ancient city of eastern Greece, indicates how long violet has been associated with spiritual qualities. In Christianity, violet symbolizes the Passion of Christ and is the color of Advent and Holy Week. Jesus is believed to have worn a purple garment when he was crucified. At one time, newborn babies were wrapped in purple cloth to encourage future fame, wealth, and success (Webster 24-25). Purple also symbolizes sensuality, spirituality, creativity, wealth, royalty, wisdom, and enlightenment (Johnson 2).

Pink is nurturing and loving. It is gentle, compassionate, self-sacrificing, and giving. It relates to femininity and innocence. It is a positive and cheerful color, which is why we describe a happy person as being "in the pink." Pink has a calming effect, and many hospitals and correctional institutions in the United States have a pink room that is used to calm down violent and emotionally disturbed people (Webster 26-27).

White is the color of purity, innocence, and protection. It provides sensations of freedom and unlimited opportunities. White eliminates negativity and encourages forgiveness and acceptance. White robes worn by priests signify spirit and light. White

garments are worn by freshly baptized Christians to signify purity after being born again. Traditionally, white dresses are worn by brides to also signify purity. “White magic” is magic that is performed with a positive goal in mind to help all and harm no one. A “white lie” is an untruth that is either harmless or is told to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. A white flag is a sign of surrender. A “whited sepulchre” is a hypocrite (Mathew 23:27). To whitewash something is to cover it up to make everything appear above board (26-27).

Brown, the color earth and of Fall, is a grounding color. It symbolizes good health, hard work, stability, and reward through effort. Brown enhances all of the other colors. Christian monks often wear brown garments because they associate it with poverty, humility, and renunciation. Sigmund Freud thought that the main symbolism for brown was excrement (Webster 28). Brown represents solidity, reliability, the color of earth, and is abundant in nature. Light brown implies genuineness and sincerity while dark brown is reminiscent of sadness and wistfulness (Johnson 2).

Gray symbolizes, respect, reverence, stability, wisdom, decay, balance, neutrality, and mourning (Johnson 2).

Black is sophisticated, powerful, and mysterious. Black traditionally has negative connotations. This is why we have terms such as blackball, blacklist, blackmail, black magic, and black market. Despite this, if you are “in the black,” you are making a profit. A “black sheep” is someone who causes embarrassment because he does not fit in with the rest of the group he belongs to. “Black magic” is magic performed for an evil purpose. Black is traditionally the color of mourning. If a black cat crosses your path, it

is considered to bring bad luck (Webster 28-29). Black also symbolizes power, wealth, mystery, evil, death, fear, sadness, mourning, mystery, seriousness, rebellion, and sorrow (Johnson 1).

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