

## Scriptotherapy in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"

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Sigmund Freud's ideas regarding the process of writing in his "The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming" imply that writing compensates for a psychic lack which the wish-fulfillment fantasy provides the writer's psyche. In this essay, Freud defines the "wish-fulfillment novel" as one in which the writer fantasizes the obtainment of desires which may be frustrated in actual life: parental love, romance, a successful career, and ultimately, tabooed wishes such as may be represented in an incestuous fantasy. In "The Institution of Autobiography," Robert Folkenflik asserts, "Freud's 'talking cure' would seem to provide an obvious model for the writing cure that autobiography offers" (qtd. in Henke 145). The popularity of the literary form of memoir today might indicate the way self-exploration can help to defuse internal conflicts, like Julie Hilden's *The Bad Daughter* or Gunter Grass's recent and controversial *Peeling an Onion*. Literary critics have recently applied findings the field of trauma studies in their approach to women's texts, analyzing the writing of traumatized artists like Anais Nin, Virginia Woolf, H.D. and others, as "scriptotherapy." Since, inevitably, there are elements of fictionalizing in supposedly factual autobiographies (perhaps no where more obviously than in Anais Nin's constantly revised "diaries"), and fact in supposedly fictional novels (like *Jane Eyre* which advertises itself as an "autobiography edited by Currer Bell," its author, Charlotte Brontë's penname), Suzette Henke in her seminal *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* examines "life-writing," both fictionalized autobiography as with H.D.'s "autobiographical fantasy," and the supposedly non-fiction works, like Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing*. For this reason, my focus on an autobiography, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and a supposed fictional work, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison might seem to transgress the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, but both of these works could be seen as examples of scriptotherapy. These two books present similar themes, and certainly show the possibility of women healing. They were also published the same year, 1970, and explore individuals of color coming of age in a traumatic era at the end of the great Depression in the U.S. and on the eve of World War II.

Henke remarks that "The twentieth century may well be remembered as a century of historical trauma" (xi). Trauma studies really began with World War I and the horrific experiences of soldiers and civilians recovering from a brutal war in which they suffered, often, both physical and psychological wounds. "Shell shock" was one term for this,

vividly shown in Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" in the lines about the soldiers so exhausted they are "deaf even to the hoots/Of disappointed shells that dropped behind."

Henke implies that although Freud and his colleague Joseph Breuer studied cases of hysteria when they began formulating the theories of what would become psychoanalysis in the 1880s, because hysterics tended to be female their mental sufferings were dismissed. Famously, one of the most problematic cases for Freud was "Dora" or Ida Bauer, who he wrote up in "A Fragment of a Study of a Case of Hysteria." Freud ignored her objections to her seduction by a family friend, and Dora refused further treatment. Freud also decided that the many reports he received from patients regarding sexual abuse were fantasized, which many (like Jeffery M. Mason) think was a betrayal of his patients. Freud decided that "in all cases the father . . . had to be accused of being perverse . . ." and "such widespread perversions toward children are not very probable" (Lermann 60). Whether it was because Freud's shift from believing that the trauma hysterics underwent was imagined rather than real discounted the severity of patients' suffering or not, it was the shell shock or post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as we call it today, afflicting returning soldiers from World War I that really began bringing attention to the debilitating effect of trauma on the human psyche and validating the seriousness of psychological problems. Hermion Lee in her 1997 biography of Woolf convincingly argues that Virginia Woolf was able to apply her own experience of psychological suffering and PTSD, the residue of sexual abuse by her half brothers throughout her childhood, into her sketch of the traumatized Septimus Smith, the soldier returned from World War I who gradually descends into psychosis and commits suicide (6).

Some of the documented symptoms of PTSD reported in *the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* include: "recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event . . . or recurrent distressing dreams," [d]iminished responsiveness to the external world, referred to as 'psychic numbing' or 'emotional anesthesia,'" and "a markedly reduced ability to feel emotions (especially those associated with intimacy, tenderness, and sexuality)." The asocial nature of these symptoms are accompanied by others: "Impaired affect modulation; self-destructive and impulsive behavior; dissociative symptoms; somatic complaints; feelings of ineffectiveness, shame, despair, or hopelessness; . . . hostility; and social withdrawal" (qtd. in Henke xvii). The traumatized subject is shattered; their psyches fragmented. There seems to be wide agreement that trauma events are not processed in the brain as other memories are: "The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, to ending, no before, no during and no after" (Laub 69). Creating a

narrative out of the traumatic event takes “fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation” reassembling them into “an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical content” (Herman 177). Henke coined the phrase “scriptotherapy” in *Shattered Subjects*, positing that the person who writes of trauma must address another, and writing magnifies the benefit of disclosure (xii). Freud prescribed “scriptotherapy” for H.D. to alleviate her writer’s block of 1933-4 (Henke 43)

Henke reports on the particular usefulness of the process of writing in healing trauma: “The subject of enunciation theoretically restores a sense of agency to the hitherto fragmented self, now recast as the protagonist in his or her life drama. Through the artistic replication of a coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency” (xvi). Scriptotherapy can re-member the body, or psyche, left in fragments after the experience of trauma. After this background, it is to two such “healing narratives” that I wish to turn.

Toni Morrison is 77 years old, and *The Bluest Eye* will be having its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2010. Morrison’s novel is both powerful and extremely disturbing to read. The out of control children’s primary school reader (Morrison calls it “the barren white-family primer” in her Afterword (215) ) which opens almost each chapter, traces Pecola Breedlove’s psychic degeneration. Yet, it is not just Pecola’s story that is told in the novel: we have her father, Cholly’s life story, her mother, Pauline, characters like “Soaphead Church” and in an afterword to the novel written in 1993, Morrison herself critiques the fragmented form of the novel. Discussing the problems which the narrative posed, she explains:

One problem was centering: the weight of the novel’s inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing. My solution—break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader—seemed to me a good idea, the execution of which does not satisfy me now. Besides, it didn’t work: many readers remain touched but not moved. (211)

I would disagree with Morrison on this point: on the contrary, the fragments are the perfect expression of the fragmented psyche and the fragmented society, and, indeed, world, being described. The book has its origin in an autobiographical incident, according to Morrison’s Afterword: a girl in her elementary school who expressed a wish for blue eyes. Morrison, apparently incredulous, broods on the incongruous wish of her friend until it erupts in tragic form. Morrison herself perhaps felt rage at the racism that was everywhere around her – the narrator (a young girl and friend of Pecola, who has a sister named Frieda) hates the

white dolls she is given, hates Shirley Temple, the white tap-dancing child who has usurped black identity and the narrator's own place in black culture – she rages, in other words, against the privileging of whites which even the black community was somehow complicit in. Pecola, on the other hand, wishes for blue eyes. For Pecola, who perceives herself as ugly, the blue eyes would make her beautiful, would make her mother love her, as her mother does the little white girl whose family she works for

The narrator, Claudia, renounces the baby dolls she gets for Christmas. She relates:

The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked. What was I supposed to do with it? Pretend I was its mother? I had not interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans y own age and size, and could not generate enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. (19-20)

Essentially, Claudia styles herself in a way diametrically opposed to Pecola. She is in a way no less pathological than Pecola, but her reaction is one born of anger, not acceptance:

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. “Here,” they said, “this is beautiful, and if you are on this day ‘worthy’ you may have it.” I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound – a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry “mama,” but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb . . . Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still. . . (20-21)

Claudia is also resentful of Shirley Temple and her association with the Bill “Bojangles” Robinson.

The white families for whom Pauline Breedlove works have the idealized suburban American lifestyle described in the children's primer with which the novel starts:

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. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (3)

Beginning with this primer Morrison implicitly but profoundly explores the violation of a child's innocence, not just at the hands of her abusive family, but as the product of a culture which is not as it presents itself in its idealized narratives as with the story of Dick and Jane – the characters of the story used in American education to teach generations of public school students. Morrison literally deconstructs this passage, repeating it 3 times: first as it goes on, the formal aspects of its language begin to fall apart, and there is no capitalization or punctuation, then the spaces between the words dissolve the third time it is repeated. The breakdown of language reflects Pecola's later breakdown into madness:

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 she wants to play who will play with jane see the cat it goes meow -meow come and play come play with jane the kitten will not play see mother mother is very nice mother will you play with jane mother laughs laugh mother laugh see father he is big and strong father will you play with jane father is smiling smile father smile see the dog bowwow goes the dog do you want to play with jane see the dog run run dog run look look here comes a friend the friend will play with jane they will play a good game play jane play (3)

The final version of the "barren white family primer" reveals the absolute shattering of language and the shattered subject which Pecola becomes. The task of the narrative of *The Bluest Eye*, however, is to use language to strengthen the authorial subject, the opposite course than that forced on Pecola.

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhe reisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehouse theyareveryhappyseejanesheshasadressshewantstohowillplaywi thjaneseethecatitgoesmeowmeowcomeandplaycomeplaywithjanethe kittenwillnotplayseemothermotherisverynicemotherwillyouplaywith janemotherlaughslaughmotherlaughseefatherheisbigandstrongfath erwillyouplaywithjanefatherissmilingsmilefathersmileseethedogbow

wowgoesthedogdoyouwanttoplaywithjaneseethedogrunrundogrunlo  
oklookherecomesafriendthefriendwillplaywithjanetheywillplayagood  
gameplayjaneplay (3)

In the novel itself, the four seasons structure the narrative—section headings are “Autumn,” “Winter,” “Spring” and “Summer” -- but also the number 3. First the dog and then the cat are sacrificed in the narrative, then Pecola herself. Three generations are shown in the narrative in the case of the Breedlove family. Each section begins first with a section narrated by Claudia, then come subchapters headed with a sentence from the run-together primer.

“Here is the green and white house . . . Here is the family” (3 ) The chapters which begin with these sentences introduce the Breedloves’ house, which is actually an old store, and totally inappropriate to house a family – Pecola and her brother Sammy share the bedroom with their parents – and the not so happy family, consisting of Pauline and Cholly, the parents, who constantly fight, Cholly fueled by alcoholic binges, and the children, both traumatized, each in their own way, by the violence and squalor surrounding them. “They lived there because they were poor and black, and because they believed themselves ugly,” the narrator explains, and Cholly’s “ugliness, the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior” (38), but “the rest of the family . . . wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them” (38).

Mrs. Breedlove provokes a fight with the drunken Cholly, whom she wants to fetch coal for the stove, which has died. Cholly refuses, and when Mrs. Breedlove sneezes she becomes irate and the fight ensues. It ends with Mrs. Breedlove hitting her husband with the stove lid, while the boy Sammy cries, “Kill him! Kill him!” Ironically, Mrs. Breedlove is surprised at this and merely asks Sammy to go fetch the coal. Meanwhile, Pecola has covered herself with a quilt. With each traumatic event Pecola suffers, she retches, and the eyes, interestingly, are always the locus for trauma:

Letting herself breathe easy now, Pecola covered her head with the quilt. The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution. There surged in her the desire to heave, but as always, she knew she would not.

“Please, God,” she whispered into the palm of her hand. “Please make me disappear.” She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was

hard, too. Almost done, almost. 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 of those pictures, all of those faces. (45)

Since Sammy and Pecola share a room with her parents, the implication is that they have witnessed parental intercourse. Trying to erase the memory of what she's seen, Pecola wills herself to disappear. Cathy Caruth says that the "greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it" (qtd. in Henke 148), and Judith Herman talks about "the numbing response of surrender" (qtd. in Henke xvii).

If Pecola cannot get rid of imagery in her head, and it seems to be traumatic memories, there is a good chance that she saw or heard her parents having sex. This is corroborated by the fact that when boys tease her in the schoolyard they slur: "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo . . ." (65). When the universally adored, light-skinned Maureen asks Pecola if she's ever seen a naked man after this, Pecola gets defensive:

. . . "No. Where would I see a naked man? . . . "I wouldn't even look at him, even if I did see him. That's dirty. Who wants to see a naked man?" Pecola was agitated. "Nobody's father would be naked in front of his own daughter. Not unless he was dirty too."

"I didn't say 'father.' I just said 'a naked man'. . . How come you said 'father'?" Maureen wanted to know? (71)

Maureen's kindness in this scene is temporary, and Pecola is profoundly isolated and ignored by both teachers and students in school. Even before her rape she has all of the characteristics of the traumatized individual. She even blames herself for the violence between her father and mother. This is where her longing for blue eyes comes:

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

*Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes, Henry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest's blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes.* (46)

This intergenerational novel in the case of Pecola's father, goes back 2 generations, and shows the problems engendered by family structures gone awry. Cholly Breedlove (and the name is of course almost too painfully ironic to comment on) has been abandoned by his

mother – in fact left on a trash heap – and only rescued by his maternal aunt to be raised by the elderly woman without a father. The violence and racism of southern America is vividly evoked when Cholly, caught in flagrante delicto by two white men in his first experience of sexual intercourse, ironically during his aunt's wake, is sexually humiliated, and his anger at this humiliation is directed not at the men but at the young girl with whom he is caught with:

The scene of Pecola's rape by her father is horrendous and disturbing. The rape is told from the perspective of Cholly, and after we have learned his own history from the narrator. Because of this we have some insight into the motivations behind this brutal and horrendous act, the rape of his own daughter. His actions are certainly not excusable, but a comment from a book entitled *Object Relations in Severe Trauma* might bring more light to Cholly's :

The relational dynamics that hold sway over the abused child are reflected in deeply held beliefs that the child evolves in order to comprehend the suffering and distorted relationships he has had to endure. To cope with the vulnerability and terror of his situation, the abused child typically comes to believe that he caused the abuse and deserved it as well. Male children in particular also defend against powerlessness and vulnerability through identification with the aggressor. This defense provides only the ost temporary of respites, for it carries in its wake the dread of doing to others what was done to oneself and immense guilt for any impulse or act in the aggressor role. The horror of these dilemmas is compounded by the child's conviction that the only way to have love is through abuse. (Prior 168)

Cholly, the narrative comments, met his eventual wife, Pauline, after he ran away from home following his aunt's death and his humiliation having found the father he went in quest of, who is utterly indifferent to him, and, indeed, to whom he never confesses being his son. Instead, Cholly suffers a complete breakdown in a strange city, loosing control of his bowels and hiding like an animal under the pier by the river. Without family, father, guidelines, ethics or morals, he is at first ecstatic meeting Pauline:

When he had met Pauline in Kentucky, she was hanging over a fence scratching herself with a broken foot. The neatness, the charm, the joy he awakened in her made him want to nest with her. He had yet to discover what destroyed that desire. But he did not dwell on it. He thought rather of whatever had happened to the curiosity he used to feel. Nothing, nothing, interested him now. Not himself, not other people. Only in drink was there some break, some floodlight, and when that closed there wssa oblivion.

But the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional was the appearance of children.

Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be. (162)

Although Pecola's sufferings are profound and the focus of the narrative, I believe Pecola should be thought of as a precursor of Beloved in the novel of that name. Pecola is the ultimate scapegoat and to some degree symbolizes the fate of African Americans in general. Her foot, deformed by a rusty nail she stepped on as a 2 year old, defines her, and she is an early version of Pecola – among her 10 brothers and sisters she is the only one who has no nickname, no identity. Fantasies of a dark handsome man sweeping her away are, unfortunately for her, literalized in Cholly. From a poor black family of the deep South, she repeats the fate of her mother, working for white families, and her delight is in ordering things, lining them up in lines, sorting, etc. In the chapter that begins with

SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICEMO  
THERWILLYOUPLAYWITHJANEMOTH  
ERLAUGHSLAUGHMOTHERLAUGHLA (110)

we learn that Pauline finds order only in the homes of the white families she works for and

Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children. Then she bent toward respectability, and is so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly's mother's. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life. (128)

The easy laugh of the white primer becomes the mad laugh of the insanity that does catch up with Pecola. Pauline has traded the manufactured fantasy of Hollywood movies (from one of which we learn from Maureen, that Pecola gets her name) to the ordered world of white families from which her own family is excluded, made obvious in the scene where Pecola knocks the blueberry cobbler from a counter where it is cooling. Even though Pecola's leg is burned from the spilled cobbler, Mrs. Breedlove's only concern is the little white girl who cries, and she sends Pecola out with Claudia and her sister Frieda who have come to find her after Frieda herself has been fondled by the lodger Mr. Henry. Claudia and her sister are on a quest to get whiskey to save Frieda from being "ruined," and in their childish misunderstanding they seem to confuse the prostitutes their mother hates with the state of being ruined or fat, and Claudia decides that Frieda needs to drink whiskey in order to avoid becoming fat (pregnant?) like Miss Marie (the Maginot Line) the fat prostitute. Ironically, it is Pecola herself who gets ruined, and Mrs. Breedlove (even Pecola always calls her Mrs. Breedlove) is indifferent to

the circumstances leading up to her daughter's rape by her own father, Cholly.

Again, it is important to realize that if Morrison is meting out blame, it is not just Cholly who should receive the blame, but the entire culture. At the end of the Great Depression and on the eve of World War II, surely underneath the cultural hatred of people of color, which has even been internalized BY people of color as this novel at least demonstrates, the persecution of the Jews by National Socialists in Germany is implied. But in exploring the position of the Negro in America at this time Morrison shows how self-hatred plays a role in the continuing victimization of children. In fact, both Morrison and Angelou got a lot of criticism for showing how people of color themselves are responsible for the violence directed against African American children. How else to explain "Soaphead Church" the colonial black who "gives" Pecola her blue eyes. We are given Soaphead's history, which instills in him a misogyny that leads him to molest children the same way Mr. Henry does. Soaphead poisons his landlady's petted dog, which he hated, in bringing about the supposed "spell" which turns Pecola's eyes blue. This is a parallel to the cat with the beautiful blue eyes whom Louis, Junior, the malevolent little boy Pecola meets in the schoolyard, takes Pecola to see, only to torture and kill the cat whom the boy's mother loves more than him, in front of poor Pecola. All are scapegoats, even, in the end, Pecola herself.

The title of the book is *The Bluest Eye*, and this deserves some attention. Because of the outrageous treatment of Pecola perhaps it should have been called *The Trials of Pecola Breedlove*. But the color blue is a leitmotif in the novel, like the spilled blueberry pie which stains Mrs. Breedlove's employer's neat floor and the white girl's clothes; Cholly's only real father figure is named "Blue," or Blue Jack; the dolls Claudia hates have the beautiful blue eyes she rejects, and the cat which Louis tortures has blue eyes. The role of incest in the novel is perhaps responsible for such elements as Mrs. Breedlove's injured foot, her lost teeth, and the prominence of eyes, all of these things signify in Freudian mythology, fear of castration --the punishment for incest in the Oedipus myth is Oedipus's blinding. At the end of the novel Pecola has gone insane, she is having a dialogue with an inner voice, a playmate no one else can see. Her identity has been finally shattered and fragmented, and it seems the struggle for her to maintain any kind of sense of herself requires her to carry a mirror around with her in which to see her imagined blue eyes. Why isn't the title of the book *The Bluest Eyes*, then? The bluest eye has the connotation of metaphorical seeing, and the bluest eye is the eye of the artist, the melancholy gaze under which the novel is dictated. I think Soaphead Church is perhaps an unlikely stand in for Morrison herself when this despicable child molester writes his letter to God:

In a way, then, this novel shows the failure of scriptotherapy, since Pecola is mad. Pecola's madness takes the form of an inner dialogue with an imaginary friend, and this making up of another self to whom "bad things happen at night" is one of the defences against trauma. I would suggest that perhaps in imagining Pecola, too, to whom "bad things happen," Morrison might be exorcising her own anxiety at the prejudice shown against people of color. She splits her own identity, in a sense, between the stalwart Claudia, and the constant victim, Pecola. The narrator Claudia, and Morrison herself, have explored the source of the puzzling preference that in Morrison's childhood at least, people of color had for white culture, white beauty, white values. The Black is Beautiful movement of the 60s and 70s allowed such exploration. The character Claudia, as well as Morrison herself, have a stronger sense of self and self-respect than does Pecola, who is the scapegoat in the novel for both white, but especially black, culture. Scriptotherapy has allowed Morrison to take apart the myths of white culture as reflected in the "white primer" of the Dick and Jane stories which portray a prosperous and perfect way of life largely unattainable in the 30s and 40s to African Americans, and address the underlying issues of the continued feeling of inferiority experienced by children being raised by parents with such lack of identity and self worth as, on the extreme, Pecola's parents, but also of those less obviously pathological in the black community as well.

Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is more obviously autobiographical than Morrison's novel. However, Angelou in an interview was once asked how she was able to select events to explore in her book, and responded: "Some events stood out in my mind more than others. Some, though, were never recorded, because they were either so bad or so painful, that there was no way to write about them honestly or artistically without making them melodramatic. They would have taken the book off its course" (Tate 7). This quote points out two things: 1) that even autobiographies involve selection and ordering that imply artistic shaping of "real" life events, and 2) that perhaps the idea of scriptotherapy doesn't apply then, to this work, if there are events that Angelou found too difficult to address here. However, in studies of Virginia Woolf's works, we see that Woolf's treatment of traumatic events developed as her oeuvre grew, and she seemed able to explore her own traumatic experiences in a more direct and confrontational way in later works like *The Years* rather than in early works like *The Voyage Out* (Kramer 47).

Maya Angelou, or Marguerite, as she was called in childhood, self-identified as white. Thinking that "one day" people would see her true self: "Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light blue eyes were going to hypnotize them . . . (2). But like Claudia

and her sister Marguerite and Bailey also destroy the white dolls she is sent for Christmas.

Marguerite and her brother were sent to live with their paternal grandmother in Arkansas and while there, they were threatened by a lynching, and watched as their Grandmother and retarded uncle were disrespected by the poor white kids who patronized the family store. Watching her grandmother and uncle being ordered around was a “painful and confusing” experience, according to Angelou. Worse, the brother and sister blame themselves for their removal from their parents and banishment from California to Arkansas. Angelou downplays their trauma but clearly they are traumatized. She says, “Because of the lurid tales we read and our vivid imaginations and, probably, memories of our brief but hectic lives, Bailey and I were afflicted: he physically and I mentally. He stuttered and I sweated through horrifying nightmares” (72).

But the worse is definitely to come when Marguerite and Bailey are summoned back to live with their mother and her live-in boyfriend Mr. Freeman. Marguerite’s mother allows her to sleep in bed with her and Mr. Freeman, and one morning when her mother leaves early, he begins fondling Marguerite. Finally he escalates – probably because he is mad at her mother – to full intercourse with Marguerite. Once again the description is horrific: “Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can’t. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot” (78). In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecolah faints after her rape, and so does Marguerite here. But because Mr. Freeman had threatened her mother and brother Bailey Marguerite cannot say anything, though she is bedridden for 2 days before the family figures out that Maya has been raped. Mr. Freeman had been forced to leave by Marguerite’s mother.

Angelou dedicates this memoir to her mother and brother. She does not cast blame on her mother. However, the reader is appalled at her lack of oversight of her children. Marguerite does blame herself, however. Once evidence of the rape has been found, Freeman goes to trial. Marguerite must take the stand, and she is asked if he has fondled her before the actual rape. Afraid that her family will punish her, because she has been so starved for affection she enjoyed being held after he was done masturbating, although she did not understand what was happening, of course. She lies and says that there had been no touching before the rape. Freeman is convicted, but while out on bail is murdered by Marguerite’s uncles. Now Marguerite is convinced her lie has somehow killed him: “. . . a man was dead because I lied. Where was the balance in that? One lie surely wouldn’t be worth a man’s life” (86). Marguerite becomes completely dumb for almost a year. At her

grandmother's house nothing is mentioned of the rape; and how can she heal from the experience if it is never confronted? She stops talking because she feels betrayed by language. Both Pecola and Marguerite seem to regress to an infantile stage, in fact what the Freudian revisionist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called the Mirror Stage. Therefore Pecola and her mirror. Pecola must verify that she exists by looking in the mirror. Marguerite seems, in her betrayal by the father figure Mr. Freeman, have felt so betrayed that she can no longer enter the Symbolic order or language, the phase children enter after the mirror stage if development is successful. And although, with the help of Mrs. Flowers, who bribes her with cookies and poetry, she finally begins talking again, her first words are condemned by her grandmother. Returning home with Mrs. Flowers cookies, she tells Bailey, 'By the way, Mrs. Flowers sent you cookies.' Her Grandmother shouts, "What did you say?" the reader thinks in shock that Marguerite has spoken again. But in fact, her Grandmother beats her, for in saying "By the way" she has referred to Christ, who is the only "Way."

Marguerite goes on to face many obstacles, and Freud would say they are of the family romance variety. Her mother's boyfriend rapes her, and her father's girlfriend stabs her! By the end of the novel, after Marguerite has lived as a vagrant for a while, one is really not surprised that she propositions a boy in order to experience consensual sex for the first time. She experiences no pleasure, but finds herself pregnant. Marguerite is alienated from her own body. Tami Spry has some illuminating comments which further explain why Marguerite might wish to stop talking:

Although a woman's body is the site upon which sexual violence occurs, a woman and her culture are denied access to its experience and knowledge; rather a woman's body is coopted by a language system which (re)presents the assaulted female body as illiterate and powerless. If knowledge is power, then those who define what knowledge is and where it is found are the power holders. In their chapter "Presence of Mind in the Absence of Body," Linda Brodkey and Michelle Fine find further evidence of women separating their self from their body for the purpose of being viewed as literate and competent. Brodkey and Fine surveyed female graduate students about sexual harassment in academe. They concentrate specifically on the ways in which the women positioned themselves as narrators of the harassing events. Brodkey and Fine write, "The narrative positions women assign themselves suggest that they understand their own survival to depend on the ability to cleave their minds from their bodies. This mind/body split reproduces in each of them the very cultural ideology that has historically been used to distinguish men from women and justify gender oppression." In seeking to conceptualize

themselves as intelligent, competent agents, the women spoke rarely of the pain and anguish related to their harassed bodies and instead concentrated on explaining the supposed motivations of the perpetrators.

Ironically, helped by her own mother, Marguerite gains confidence in herself as a teenage mother. However, it would not be until she was in her 40s that Angelou would publish this book. And perhaps one reason that Angelou published largely memoirs is precisely the drive toward scriptotherapy. With so many traumatic events and so little willingness in her family to discuss them, the burden of these experiences must be difficult to bear.

In conclusion, the writings and lives of these two, and many other women, demonstrate that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is something many of them suffer from, perhaps without their knowing it. As Judith Herman notes in *Trauma and Recovery*, “Not until the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s was it realized that the most common post traumatic disorders are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life” (28). These works, both of 1970, were among the first to bring attention to sexual abuse of girls, and pivotal in exploring how lack of self-worth may affect black girls. Life-writing, whether fact or fiction, combined with psychotherapy or other treatments or not, may rescue the writer from psychic fragmentation and provide absolution. It may heal the reader as well, just as Pecola’s story affects Claudia. At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia as narrator confesses regarding Pecola: “All of use—all of us who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her” (205).

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