How Narrative Devices Convey the Theme of Love in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

Hur berättarstrategier förmedlar temat kärlek i Toni Morrisons *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the way in which three narrative devices expand upon three types of love depicted in Toni Morrison’s novel The Bluest Eye. The three narrative devices examined in this essay are narrator, paratext and the irony of the Breedlove family name. These devices all serve the purpose of conveying different types of love in Morrison’s novel and how these types of love affect the characters of the novel, especially the protagonist Pecola Breedlove. Narrator plays an important role because the narrative voice changes throughout the novel, shifting between Claudia MacTeer and a third-person omniscient narrator. This shifting perspective shows the reader how the types of love affect Pecola both through a child’s perspective and as well as through third-person narration. The Dick and Jane paratext contrasts the Breedlove family to white American ideals of familial love and happiness. Finally, the lack of familial love within the Breedlove family truly shows the irony of the Breedlove family name. The lack of love forces Pecola to internalize her self-hatred while the destructive, distant and judgmental relationship between Mrs. Breedlove and Pecola causes both characters to become delusional and dissatisfied with their sense of self. Friendship is the only place where Pecola finds love, shown to her by Claudia and Frieda; however, Pecola has already descended too far into madness for their love to help her. Although Pecola should find solace in the three types of love that are presented through the novel’s narrative devices, they all contribute to her disillusionment and, ultimately, her descent into madness.
Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye* depicts a year in the life of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl, and is set in Lorain, Ohio during the years immediately following the Great Depression. Though the novel is centered on the inferiority complex Pecola develops due to her skin and eye color, Morrison richly describes the community in which Pecola lives. In doing so, Morrison utilizes three key narrative devices, namely narrator, paratext and the Breedlove family name. The narrator plays an important role in Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*. The narrative voice within the novel shifts between Claudia MacTeer and a third-person narrator. This shifting perspective gives the reader both a close, personal telling of Pecola’s story through a child’s perspective as well as third-person narration that shows how Pecola’s story fits within, and is affected by, her family and the society in which she lives. Not only is narration important to the actual telling of Pecola’s story, it helps reveal and underscore the themes within the novel, especially the theme of love. When exploring the relationships depicted in *The Bluest Eye*, it becomes clear that love, or the lack thereof, is an important theme in the novel. Many characters in *The Bluest Eye* desire love; however, most of the characters do not receive it in the way that they desire it. Morrison clearly portrays many types of love in the novel; however, familial love, maternal love and friendship are the main types of love revealed through the narration and narrative devices used in the novel. This essay will discuss Toni Morrison’s use of narrator, paratext and the irony of the Breedlove family name and show how these narrative devices expand upon and bolster the three aspects of love she presents in *The Bluest Eye*: friendship, familial love and maternal love. This essay will also look into how the narrative devices and aspects of love influence the way in which the characters perceive themselves and fuel Pecola’s descent into madness.

Morrison makes it clear from the beginning of the novel that there will be two distinct narrative voices in *The Bluest Eye*: a third-person omniscient narrator and a first-person narrator, Claudia MacTeer, who tells Pecola’s story from her point of view. The novel is immediately divided into two frames, the outer frame narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator on the extradiegetic level of narration, and the inner frame narrated by Claudia on the intradiegetic level of narration. The novel begins with a prologue started by a Dick and Jane paratext that is narrated by the third-person narrator. These paratextual segments are always placed before the outer frame of narration and are demonstrative
of what will happen in the following chapter or section of the novel. This paratext is quickly shown to be the ideal version of an American family, one that is not true in Pecola Breedlove’s world. The story is then picked up and narrated by an unnamed first-person narrator—who is later found to be Claudia MacTeer. The prologue of *The Bluest Eye* is important in establishing the narrators and narrative style used in the novel. The prologue forewarns the reader of the alternating points of view, between third-person omniscient and first-person overt narrator as well as splits the novel into two distinct frames. The outer paratextual frame of the novel contrasts the Breedlove family to the ideal white, upper-middle-class American Dick and Jane family while the inner frame centers on the MacTeer family. Although the MacTeer’s are not the ideal American family as described by the paratextual frame, Claudia MacTeer lives in a stable, loving home that, in her narration, she uses as a point of contrast to the Breedloves’. By utilizing these frames and narrative voices, Morrison is able to present in depth and expand upon the three aspects of love she presents in *The Bluest Eye*: friendship, familial love and maternal love.

All four sections of *The Bluest Eye* (autumn, winter, spring and summer) begin with chapters narrated from Claudia MacTeer’s perspective. Claudia tells Pecola’s story from her first-person point of view, informing the reader of her friendship with Pecola and showing how Pecola’s insanity was unavoidable, no matter how much she or her sister Frieda cared for her. Lynne Tirrell claims that young Claudia’s narration is “unjustified” because her point of view is subjective and shrouded in the innocence and unknowingness of childhood (15). Although this type of narration can be seen as unjustified, it is integral to understanding the friendship between Claudia, Frieda and Pecola. Tirrell goes on to state in her book that young Claudia “wants to tell her own story and she wants it to be justified, to be right” (15). There are many points in Claudia’s narration where the reader is able to tell that Claudia is aware of the tragedy of Pecola’s situation and wants to help her friend. Claudia is able to see that Pecola is consumed by society’s standards of beauty, when for example, she drinks all the MacTeer’s milk for the sole purpose of looking at the picture of Shirley Temple on the glass. Claudia witnesses and acknowledges the lack of love in Pecola’s relationship with her mother, Pauline. Through Claudia’s narrative perspective the reader is able to experience Pecola first hand. Pecola is never the narrator of her own story, making Claudia’s first-person narration the closest the reader can come to knowing Pecola. In
some ways having Claudia as the first-person narrator allows the reader to become more intimately acquainted with Pecola than if Pecola herself was the first-person narrator. Because of the ways in which society and her family have negatively impacted Pecola and caused her madness, having Claudia as a narrator gives a clearer depiction of Pecola’s life through the eyes of a young girl.

Claudia’s first-person narration gives insight into the friendship—a type of love portrayed by Morrison in the novel—between Claudia, Frida and Pecola. Pecola feels that she is isolated and alone; however, Claudia and Frieda MacTeer care for Pecola and are essentially her only friends. Having Claudia narrate portions of the text in the first person gives the reader an intimate glimpse of their friendship and shows that there are people that love and care for Pecola. In the first chapter of the novel Pecola goes to live with the MacTeer family while her father, Cholly Breedlove, is in jail. The MacTeer girls are under their mother’s orders to “be nice to her [Pecola] and not fight” (Morrison 15). While Claudia and Pecola are at first kind to Pecola due to her being “a case” (Morrison 15), they quickly accept her into their lives and become empathetic to her situation. They share a bed with Pecola in Chapter 1, defend her from the boys and Maureen Peal in Chapter 4 and care for her in Chapter 6. Claudia’s first-person narration plays a big role in Chapter 6. When Frieda and Claudia go and visit Pecola at her mother’s work place, Claudia observes that Pecola seems really happy to see her friends because “She was smiling, and since it was a rare thing to see on her, I was surprised at the pleasure it gave me” (Morrison 72). Since Claudia is only a few years younger than Pecola, the racism, prejudice and societal pressure put onto Pecola are seen through a child’s perspective. She can see the effect it has on her friend Pecola and wants nothing more than for her friend to be free of this burden. This is the only time before Pecola descends into madness that Claudia depicts Pecola as happy in her narration. This one line, a seemingly off-hand remark made by Claudia, reminds the reader that Pecola is a child. Her childlike and care-free happiness at seeing her friends shows that at this stage in the novel Pecola has not yet succumbed to madness: she is still recognizable as the girl that Claudia knew. Madness does not befall Pecola all at once; her young soul is marred by societal expectations and pressures that are too heavy for her to carry and drag her down slowly until they consume her and take over her mind.
Claudia and Frieda’s friendship with Pecola is the only relationship in Pecola’s life that brings her happiness. It is clear that this sentiment extends both ways as Frieda and Claudia are shown to be very fond of her. Claudia is especially fond of Pecola and values her as a person, something that is shown through her bias in narration, always speaking lovingly of her and empathizing with her as she begins to see the signs of her madness. Claudia and Frieda see the cruel things that happen to her and try to help her as best they can: they try to defend Pecola and they are the only ones in the community that hope her baby lives when it is found that Pecola is pregnant. They even go as far as planting the marigold seeds they intended to sell in order to make money for a new bike, Claudia telling the reader directly that “we could think of nothing but our own magic: if we plant these seeds, and said the right words over them, they would blossom and everything would be alright” (Morrison 10). Claudia and Frieda had hoped that by chanting and nurturing the flowers, they would bring good fortune to Pecola and the baby would live. The girls despair, feeling guilty that their love for Pecola is not enough to help her. This is the point where Claudia realizes that “the horror at the heart of her [Pecola’s] yearning is exceeded by the evil of fulfillment” (Morrison 137). Frieda and Claudia’s innocence is tied to Pecola’s madness. The failure of their magic is a clue that the magic and naïveté of childhood are not enough to save someone that grows up in a toxic community. This realization hints at Tirrell’s claim that Claudia’s first-person narration is not valid due to her childlike and innocent views of Pecola due to their close friendship. Once Claudia takes a step back and acknowledges the fact that she is unable to save her friend, her narrative voice becomes justified as she “wrenches the notion of justification free from that of objectivity” caused by her childhood friendship with Pecola (Tirrell 15). Her narration truly becomes justified when Claudia begins to see the bias in her childhood feelings towards Pecola and her view of Pecola begins to match that of the other characters in the novel and the one the reader receives of Pecola.

When Claudia is the narrator of a chapter she often compares her own home life to Pecola’s, which, in turn, examines the theme of familial love in the novel. Claudia gives her own household as a concrete example of a loving home. She shows that it is possible for a family to be healthy and functional as well as capable of love within the same community as Pecola’s. With this comparison it is easy for the reader to see the how truly destructive the Breedlove family is. Love is
apparent in the MacTeer household. The family supports each other; Mrs. MacTeer and Frieda take care of Claudia when she is sick in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 6 when Frieda is inappropriately touched by Mr. Henry the entire family helps in defending Frieda and cheering her up. This familial love is also extended to discipline. The whippings that are a form of discipline in the MacTeer household are often talked about by Claudia. In Chapter 4 Frieda and Claudia discuss whether eating turnips or getting whipped for burning them would be a better option “Which you want? A whipping and no turnips, or turnips and no whippings?” (Morrison 77). The girls agree that getting whipped would be better than having to eat the turnips. In Chapter 6 there is a similar thought when Claudia is lying down in the grass contemplating the new, green spring trees “there was a nervous meanness in these long twigs that made us long for the steady stroke of a strap or the honest slap of a hairbrush” (Morrison 68). Pecola is included in this discipline too when she is staying with the MacTeers as Claudia states “Mama looked at Pecola. ‘You too!’ she said. ‘Child of mine or not!’” (Morrison 29). It is true that they do have an effect on the girls. Claudia states in one of her narrative reflections that the whippings insulted Frieda and wounded her pride; however, they were never intended as a form of abuse (Morrison 29). Claudia effectively juxtaposes this to the Breedlove household. Claudia and Frieda know that the whippings are merely a form of discipline and that their parents love them no matter what, a love not felt in the Breedlove family. Cholly and Pauline, in contrast to Mrs. And Mr. MacTeer, emotionally abuse their children, contributing to Pecola’s isolation and decent into madness. They refuse to even whip or beat their children, cutting off all physical as well as emotion ties to their children, leaving them barren of love.

As opposed to the MacTeer family, which is narrated in the first person by Claudia, the Breedlove family is narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator. The emotion and kindness Claudia puts into her narration is distinctly lacking in the third-person narration. When examining the Breedlove family, one can see that familial love mimics the cold third-person narration and is absent within their family unit. When the Breedlove’s home life is described it is stated that “each member of the family is in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality—collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another,
they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other” (Morrison 28). The Breedloves are content to live separate from each other and as Jane S. Bakerman states in an article on female initiation in the novels of Toni Morrison, the Breedloves’ “all live lives of profound isolation in a society that does not want them” (543). The depiction of the Breedlove family through a third-person narrator is distinct in showing the isolation and lack of love within the Breedlove family. Even though the reader acquires a lot of information through the third-person omniscient narrator, this type of narration is distant and cold compared to Claudia’s first-person narration. The reader does not get the same intimate view as when Claudia interjects her thoughts and feelings about Pecola and mimics the distance between the members of the Breedlove family. The harsh truths and impartial views of the narrator only serve to emphasize the family members’ detachment from each other, society and sanity.

The only time Pecola is shown any ounce of “love” is when Cholly rapes her. Bakerman states that “for Pecola, the healthy sexual encounter symbolizing initiation into the adult world is forbidden, for when someone does see her as lovable, it is her father, and he rapes her” (Bakeman 547). After Cholly rapes Pecola, Morrison writes that “again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her” (161). The mention of hatred for Pecola and the “forced” actions of covering his unconscious daughter, combined with the fact that Cholly rapes her, shows the true delusion of the family. This delusion is again mirrored in the narration of this chapter. Pecola’s rape is narrated by the third-person narrator resulting in a colder, objective view. The void of feeling between Pecola and Cholly is accentuated by the sharp, direct language used in the chapter and draws upon feelings of helplessness and anger presented in the previous chapter discussing Cholly’s childhood. The narration of the chapter makes clear that Cholly is incapable of showing love without hurting his family and it affects Pecola most of all, pulling her down and contributing to her madness. While the sense of love and comfort one usually finds in one’s family could not possibly save Pecola from her internalized self-hatred it could have very well prevented her from descending into madness; however the Breedlove family is void of love which only serves to fuel her downward spiral.
Another type of love communicated through the narration in *The Bluest Eye* is maternal love. This is seen through both Mrs. MacTeer and, to a greater extent, Pauline Breedlove. Both women are mothers to multiple children; however, they differ greatly, through narration and the effects their parenting has on their children—Mrs. MacTeer taking on the closeness of Claudia’s intradiegetic level of narration while Pauline Breedlove continues to be narrated on the extradiegetic level accentuating the coldness she feels towards Pecola. Mrs. MacTeer is not the first-person narrator but she takes on the sense of closeness and kindness Claudia exudes while interacting with Pecola while she is narrating the chapter. Even though Mrs. MacTeer is a secondary character, it is clear that she is a good mother to the MacTeer girls and a good woman. Mrs. MacTeer does not reject Pecola when the county places her in the care of the MacTeer family and proceeds to show only kindness to her. She pushes aside the prejudices that surround the Breedlove family, and although she does still criticize the Breedloves, none of the criticism is aimed at Pecola, only at Cholly and Pauline’s parenting abilities. While Pecola is living in the MacTeers’ care, she is treated very much like family. Mrs. MacTeer threatens to give Pecola the same punishments she would give her own girls, helps Pecola when she menstruates for the first time and does not yell at her or call her out when she drinks an entire carton of milk in one day. In Chapter 1 Claudia says that when she was in a fuss “mama never named anybody—just talked about folks and some people” (Morrison 22). Claudia states that her mother found the Shirley Temple cup and knew it was Pecola as she greatly admired Shirley for her beauty and success in achieving the white standard of beauty. Elizabeth B. House expands on this by saying “the woman knows it was Pecola who emptied the milk carton because the two MacTeer sisters, who ultimately reject competitive success, ‘hated milk’” (House 185). Because Pecola was so used to a harsh home environment and a void of familial and motherly love, Pecola does not seem to acknowledge the motherly kindness shown to her by Mrs. MacTeer. Although Mrs. MacTeer is able to show Pecola a type of love that is lacking in her life Pecola only lives with the MacTeers for a few days until she is placed back into the care of the Breedloves, not enough time for the motherly love shown to her to have any positive effect on her development.
When investigating the relationship between Mrs. Breedlove and Pecola one can see the effects maternal love has on both characters. In contrast to Mrs. MacTeer, Pauline Breedlove is mostly narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator; however, Pauline’s own voice interrupts the third-person narration in Chapter 6. Madhu Dubey writes that “the narrator’s interpretation of Pauline’s life is framed at both ends by Pauline’s own interpretation” (Dubey 47). She goes on to say that Pauline’s “expressive Southern dialect” serves to unbalance “the narrative hierarchy established at the beginning of the chapter, as the immediacy of Pauline’s voice is often more effectively powerful than the word of the detached analyst” (Dubey 47). Dubey also makes it clear that Pauline is not a narrator in *The Bluest Eye*. She states that Pauline’s interpretations, although powerful in meaning, are akin to a dream or daydream as opposed to her interacting directly with the readers or with the omniscient narrator. This is true as Pauline’s thoughts are italicized, just like Pecola’s imaginary friends’ voice is in the last chapter of the novel. This parallel makes a connection between the two, hinting that just as Pecola imagines or dreams that she is holding a conversation, Pauline is also daydreaming when she gives her own interpretation of her life. The snippets of Pauline’s voice personalize the text describing Pauline’s life and allow her to, in a sense, tell her own story and describe why she turned out to be the mother she is. This type of narration stresses the rift between Pauline and Pecola. Through narration it becomes clear that Mrs. Breedlove used to love her children and still does, though not to the extent that she once did. Pauline states “When I had the second one, a girl, I’member I said I’d love it no matter what it looked like. She looked like a black ball of hair” but later, after she states her fondness for Pecola, she adds “but I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (Morrison 126). Ugliness plays an important aspect in their relationship because Pauline has equated ugliness with unworthiness of love. She thrusts ugliness onto Pecola from the day she is born and from then on Pauline’s love for Pecola begins to dissipate, until, ultimately, she is left with a void of love that pushes Pecola into madness. The reader is able to understand Pauline more as a character when her own voice is included in the text. Although Pauline is not a narrator, her voice and commentary is included and woven into the third-person narration in such a way that her commentary reinforces the claims made by the narrator and in this way the reader can truly see how her views on beauty and sense of worth affect Pecola.
Another aspect of Pecola and Pauline’s destructive relationship that is revealed through narration is that Pauline Breedlove chooses to focus on the loneliness she feels. Instead of seeking love and comfort from her family, Pauline isolates herself from the rest of her family by escaping into the ‘white world’. Pauline distances herself mentally from her family, causing the loneliness and isolation she feels to extend to her children. This distance is again underscored by the third-person narrator as the third-person narration is void of emotion. The rift between Pauline and the rest of the family is parallel to the rift between the third-person narration and emotion. The emotion in the third-person narration is a descriptive afterthought, just as Pauline’s feelings and emotions for her own family “… were like afterthoughts one has just before sleep” (Morrison 125). Through her job at the Fisher’s and her want to live the white lifestyle, Mrs. Breedlove lives in a façade until she can no longer see past it. At the Fisher’s “power, praise and luxury were hers” (Morrison 88). She found what she wanted through the Fisher’s. She was a loved and cherished servant and eventually “all the meaningfulness of her life was in her work” (Morrison 88). Pauline “kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into the storefront or to her children” (Morrison 88). Pauline lives in her own world and attempts to separate her two lives. She seems to think that when she is in the Fisher household, she becomes white. She, in a sense, becomes as delusional as Pecola. Pecola watches her mother become more distant over time and, as she fades, Mrs. Breedlove’s only connection to her becomes ridicule and judgment. Mrs. Breedlove’s distance fuels Pecola’s decent into madness. She feels that she is “rejected by her mother” because she cannot reach the white standards to which she holds Pecola, symbolizing “her own failure to thrive” (Eckard).

The second narrative device Morrison uses to convey the theme of love in her novel is paratext. Morrison includes paratextual segments taken from Dick and Jane children’s books and positions them before the outer frame throughout the novel. In An Introduction to Narratology Monika Fludernik writes that paratextual structuring elements can include short excerpts and notes but can also include “typographical elements such as the choice and size of font, marginal notes or illustrations accompanying the text” (Fludernik 23). Morrison’s chosen Dick and Jane paratext blends both visual and structural elements. This material stands on its own, outside the third-person narration, and is
indicative of what follows in the outer frame narrative. Thus, it is fitting that *The Bluest Eye* begins the prologue with a paratextual segment from the Dick and Jane books.

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 (Morrison 1)

The next paragraph restates the passage from the Dick and Jane books; however, it excludes all punctuation, then it is repeated again with no spacing, making the passage a run-on sentence.

The Dick and Jane paratext is used throughout the novel to mark chapters that are narrated in third person. The style of these paratextual passages vary greatly from the rest of the novel. They are in bold capitals without any punctuation or spaces between the words. The words are cut off in order to fit the three, short lines allotted to them. In Chapter 2 the Dick and Jane paratext reads:

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HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWH
ITEITHASAREDDOORITISVERYPRETT
YITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTYP
(Morrison 31)
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According to Kuenz the paratextual segments are “the seeming given for contemporary life” and the passages at the beginning of the chapter “stand as the only visible model for happiness and thus implicitly accuses those whose lives do not match up” (Kuenz 422). It is true that these passages do present an ideal, white, happy family that is the strict opposite of the Breedlove family, which is poor, black and unhappy; however, the paratextual segments are structured in such a strange way that makes it difficult for the reader to read. Because the passage repeats the last word and trails off at the end, it is
made clear that there is something wrong with these ideals. The repetition in the paratext represents and underscores society’s fixation on beauty and because the Breedloves cannot measure up to the presented standards of beauty, it hints at the ugliness the Breedloves believe they possess and deserve.

As already noted, familial love is one of the main types of love presented through narration in *The Bluest Eye*. Most of what the reader learns about Pecola’s family life is depicted by the third-person omniscient narrator. All the chapters that are narrated in this fashion begin with a paratextual passage from the Dick and Jane books. Kuenz writes that the placement of the Dick and Jane paratext at the beginning of the chapters “…makes it the pretext for what is presented after” (Kuenz 422). Each passage from the Dick and Jane books essentially tells the reader what the subject of the chapter will be. As the reader begins the chapter that is headed by one of the Dick and Jane passage, they immediately see that nothing presented in the chapter is as filled with happiness and love as it is in the Dick and Jane paratext. For example, Chapter 2 begins with a passage describing Dick and Jane’s pretty green and white house while the ensuing paragraph describes the Breedlove family home, which is ugly, old and dilapidated.

Friendship is an important aspect of love Pecola struggles with throughout the novel. Claudia and Frieda MacTeer are Pecola’s friends; however, it is made clear that the only person Pecola truly considers her friend is the imaginary friend she has a conversation with at the end of the novel. At this point in the novel Pecola has become so deluded with white standards of beauty, her obsession with obtaining blue eyes and her scarring rape and pregnancy, that she has become mad and believes that she finally has blue eyes given to her by Mr. Soaphead Church. In the last chapter of the novel, the reader experiences Pecola’s madness first hand. The chapter begins with a Dick and Jane paratext stating

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LOOKLOOKHERECOMESAFRIENDTHE
FRIENDWILLPLAYWITHJANETHEYWI
LLPLAYAGOOGAMEPLAYJANEPLAY
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(Morrison 191)

After reading the paratext the reader expects some sort of happy resolution for Pecola as Jane is happily playing with a friend in the paratext. Instead, the reader is immediately confronted with an up-
close view of Pecola’s raw emotion and delusion. Pecola’s madness has been foreshadowed and hinted at throughout the novel but this is the only time the reader actually sees its manifestation and the tragedy it brings.

This is surprising to the reader not only because one gets to experience Pecola’s madness from her point of view but because of the way in which it is narrated. This section breaks the pattern of narration in the novel. By having this paratext at the beginning of the chapter it is indicated that the chapter will be narrated by the third-person narrator; however, Pecola and her imaginary friends’ interaction is purely made up of dialogue. There is no narrator, only Pecola’s dialogue—in regular font—and Pecola’s imaginary friend’s commentary—in italics. The lack of narrator within this interaction not only allows the reader to hear Pecola’s voice, as this is the most she has said in the entire novel, but it also shows her disconnect with the world around her. Pecola now lives in her own world; everything other than her conversation with her friend passes by without her noticing. When this section of dialogue between Pecola and the imaginary friend ends, the third-person narrator begins narrating the last chapter of the novel by explaining Pecola’s madness and describing the life she now lives—days spent alone, walking through the trash heaps at the edge of town. Pecola is so caught up in admiring her new eyes and the good things they supposedly bring into her life that she is blind to the outside world. There is no need for narration here because this look into Pecola’s mind truly shows how isolated and delusional she really is and having a narrator would imply that she was interacting with the world around her, something she is definitely not doing. This conversation with the imaginary friend truly shows the difference in her character from earlier in the novel when she did not have blue eyes. The reader is able to pick up on the fact that she is a lot happier and more confident even though she is delusional in her belief that the color of her eyes have changed. In her rapid exchange with her imaginary friend she reveals her insecurity over the fact that the friend will leave and she will be alone and the loneliness and isolation she felt at home will reappear.

The third narrative device used by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* is the irony of the Breedlove family name. Due to the isolation and lack of love within the Breedlove family, their family name, Breedlove, becomes an ironic symbol. The Breedloves do not breed love; instead, they blame each other
for their own shortcomings and failures. The Breedloves are bound to each other and they inhabit the same ugly, down-trodden apartment—in technical terms they are a family but they do not love each other; they do nothing but assure the mutual destruction of the other family members. This stems from Cholly and Pauline Breedlove’s internalized hatred for themselves and each other. In her article Jane S. Bakerman comments on the love-less landscape of the Breedlove home: “her [Pecola’s] parents, Cholly and Pauline, have accepted the idea that they are ugly and in doing so have come to hate each other” (544). According to Morrison “their ugliness was unique. No one could convince them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly”; however, Morrison goes on to say that “you looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized it came from conviction, their conviction” (Morrison 36). The Breedloves truly believe that they are ugly. Society teaches people that possessing beauty and living up to society’s beauty standards make people worthy of love. Elizabeth B. House explains that because each of the Breedloves believe that “being attractive gives them the power of commanding love” and because they don’t possess attractiveness, they are not worthy of receiving love or capable of giving it (House 182). They become so deranged in this notion that Pauline and Cholly resent each other for assuring their place in society, as the ugly, undeserving family. They choose not to blame standards set by society or even the ugliness itself but rather choose to internalize it and deal with it in ways that isolate them from the rest of their family—Cholly through drinking and Pauline through her job at the Fisher’s. They take their frustrations out on their children and, in turn Pecola and Sammy internalize the ugliness thrust upon them and isolate themselves from their family. They learn to believe that they are not worthy of their parents’ love and are unable to love each other because of their ugliness. In this way the family ultimately becomes void of love as the family members are incapable of loving their family and even less so are they capable of loving themselves.

Pecola herself is unable to breed love. Her family name haunts her as she is unable to love or be loved. Her emotions are stunted through the hatred and isolation of her family. Pecola is particularly affected by the fact that her parents are unable to show her love. In an article Phyllis R. Klotman says that “the Breedloves—in spite of the name—are unable to show Pecola the love that would mitigate her
rejection by society” (Klotman 124). Cholly is drunk, abusive and does not know how to connect with his children while Pauline is absent, self-loathing and thinks of herself a martyr as she is the breadwinner of the family. Sammy and Pecola are essentially left on their own, vying for the love and affection of their parents, something they never receive. Bakerman states that “Pecola is carefully taught that there is no one to love her, that whites do not see her, that blacks scorn her” (Bakerman 547). Pecola becomes deranged with the notions of seclusion and loneliness. She finds herself isolated at home, at school and in society. She believes what she has been taught: that she is ugly, unworthy and unlovable; even when her friends Claudia and Frieda show her kindness and caring, she is either unable to, or refuses to, accept their love.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison’s utilization of narrative devices—narrator, paratext, and the irony of the Breedlove family name—heavily influences the three aspects of the theme of love she presents in *The Bluest Eye*. All three aspects affect the way in which the characters perceive themselves as well as fuel Pecola’s descent into madness. Through Claudia’s first-person narration the reader becomes acquainted with the MacTeer family as well as with Pecola, the main character of the novel. Claudia and Pecola’s friendship brings light to the struggles Pecola faces and presents them from a child’s perspective. Pecola does not narrate her own story; thus Claudia’s narrative perspective gives the reader an intimate glimpse of Pecola’s life. Familial love and maternal love, both presented by the third-person omniscient narrator, are especially relevant to Pecola and her descent into madness. Morrison shows the tragedy and desperation of Pecola’s situation by not only describing the presence of love but by showing that the lack of familial and maternal love is destructive to the way in which her characters perceive themselves. The third-person narrative perspective distances the reader from Pecola, as well as the other characters discussed by the omniscient narrator, by using blunt language to truthfully describe the loveless, mutually destructive situations the characters face. The only time the third person-narration is broken is in Chapter 6 when Pauline Breedlove’s first-person accounts are included in the narration. Pauline’s first-person segments do not have the personalizing sense of closeness that Claudia has when she is narrating. On the contrary, they merely serve to support the air of distance and tragedy the third-person narration brings to the narrative. The Dick and Jane paratext is utilized as a way to contrast the
Breedlove family to the ideal, white, happy family. Not only does the paratext show the unhappiness and ugliness in the Breedlove family, it marks Pecola’s descent into madness. Pecola’s dialogue with her imaginary friend is headed by a Dick and Jane paratext that truly shows how unhappy and delusional she has become over the course of the novel. The irony of the Breedlove family name plays an important role in discussing familial love as it is shown that the Breedloves do not breed love. The Breedlove family argues and blames each other for the family’s shortcomings and failures. This is shown to have an effect on all the Breedlove family members, especially Pecola. Morrison’s use of narrator, paratext and the irony of the Breedlove family name all serve to help her expand upon and portray familial love, maternal love and friendship, three relationships that are integral in shaping the way in which the characters in the novel see themselves and fuel Pecola’s descent into madness.
Works Cited


