Overview of Contemporary Anglophone African Literature; Case study: Toni Morison’s The Bluest Eye

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An Overview of Contemporary Anglophone African Literature

1. Definition of Anglophone African Literature

African literature refers to the literature of the African peoples. The African concept includes oral literature. We define “Anglophone literature” as literatures in English produced by writers from nations that are former colonies of Britain, excluding the United States. The term “Anglophone” highlights the linguistic commonality of these writings.

So, from the above definitions we understand that Anglophone African literature refers to lit that is conceived and executed in English by writers of african background.

2. The evolution of the African novel from ‘oracy’ to contemporary novel

Contrary to a misconception which still prevails, the Africans were familiar with literature and art for many years before their contact with the Western world.

2.1 Beginning of the Novel in Africa 1: Orality

It is clear that Africa has a rich oral tradition. African oral tradition carries the African storytelling tradition with it. It embodies African beliefs and general attitudes to life. The myth and legends carry the historical realities in the life of the primordial Africans. They transmit and store the values of their experiences by telling the tales to the younger generations as guide.

While the novel is a Western form, African writers have helped to shape the genre. However, African authors embrace an aesthetic that differs from that of Western novelists. Specifically, African writers use the novel to preserve oral-traditional literature, to inform
readers about political and cultural events, and to challenge Western stereotypes and histories about Africa. Western readers of African novels must be aware of these conventions in order to appreciate and understand novels written by Africans.

African fiction started as an oral form it has a various influences on the emerging of the African novel. There was a smooth transition from orature to literature.

2.2 Beginning of the Novel in Africa 2: Pamphleteering

when people started to read and write they did not hesitate at expressing themselves in pamphlets (pamphlets then were popular and they were used in election campaigns).

People started to write whatever comes in their mind because pamphleteering had no standard form or guiding rules covering the subject matters. they started to write inorder to bring African orality into the print.

Also the authors have the joy of being read by others and being classified among the circleof writers. The pages are usually very few and written in very simple and transliterated English forms."

Many Africans who were able to attend foreign universities under scholarship began to write different forms of literature. This is one way they hoped to record their experiences, and affect their societies. Formal novels in Africa began by expressing African worldviews and projecting African culture. The problem of identity and independence were major preoccupations.

2.3 The Rise of the Anglophone African Novel

In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in those tongues. In 1911, Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published what is probably the first African novel written in English, Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation. Its publication and positive reviews in the
Western press mark a watershed moment in African literature. Interestingly, led to the emergence of African American literature

3. The issue of language

When african writers started to write in english they were attacked by some critics of african literature the believed that English Language is an imperial language representing colonialism. They advocated that African writers should use their native languages in writing literatures. They believed that African novels are for the consumption of African people alone. Many writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, Okot P’Bitek, Wole Soyinka amongst others practised writing in their native dialects but these never yielded wider acclaim. The advocates of this theory believe that African fiction will truly be identified as African if written in African languages expressing African ideas and philosophies. The educated ones were worried about the way Africa and Africans are being portrayed. They believed that writing in English or other colonial languages would enable them reach a wider audience.

4. African-American Literature

Another controversial aspect of identification of African fiction is the inclusion of literary works by African slaves in America. The African works best known in the West from the period of colonization and the slave trade are primarily slavenarratives, such as Olaudah Equiano’s The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African(1789). There is also Alex Harley’s Roots which also gave accurate account of the slave trade experiences of the Africans in fictional mode.

The issue of race and tensions of color pushed African Americans to use writing to establish a place for themselves in that community. The English contributed to the issue of segregation. They had developed the ideas of inferiority and distinction through drawing on
preconceptions rooted in images of blackness and physical differences between the two peoples. African American literature embodies novels, poems and plays showing the status of race as a whole. The writers’ works reflect their identities.

African American literature presents a wide range of writings from the colonial period to the present. It is related to different literary periods: The colonial period (1746-1800), antebellum period (1800-1865), the reconstruction period (1865-1900), the protest movement (1960-1969) and Contemporary period (1970-present).

References


5. Contemporary African-American Women Writers

The emergence of feminist views in the 1970s highlighted the essence of African-American women’s literature which was not regarded as noteworthy before. African-American women’s literary tradition is marked by common themes such as racial and gender inequality, fate and condition of a black female and female writer, the peculiarities of the formation of black woman’s identity, her search for selfhood, her position and roles in a multicultural society, and black woman’s consciousness. In the 1970s women began to openly express their experience as both suppressed women and members of minority groups.

The black women writers of the period – Glorya Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Shirley Anne Williams, and Gayl Jones – explored the issues of their problematic position and struggle for liberation in a racial and mainstream culture. Their work marked a significant shift in African-American literature. As Catharine R Stimpson states, black women writers
also claimed for the rejection of male power over women, the deconstruction of dominant images of black women, and the need for women to construct their own experience, history, and identity.

The most representative black female writers of recent period include Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou who continue such central themes in African-American women’s literary tradition as female friendship, search for and discovery of identity and community, racial oppression and sexual violence, the importance of ancestry.

6. Biography of Toni Morisson

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 and spent the first years of her life in Ohio. She received an undergraduate degree in English from Howard University and completed a master's program at Cornell. When many of her classmates had difficulty pronouncing her uncommon first name, she changed it to Toni (a derivative of her middle name). In 1958, she married Harold Morrison, an architect from Jamaica, and the couple had two sons. They divorced six years later. After pursuing an academic career teaching English at Howard, Morrison became an editor at Random House, where she specialized in Black fiction.

At the same time, she began building a body of creative work that, in 1993, would make her the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Morrison’s first novel, The Bluest Eye, was not an immediate success, but she continued to write. Sula, which appeared in 1973, was more successful, earning a nomination for the National Book Award. In 1977, Song of Solomon launched Morrison’s national reputation, winning her the National Book Critics’ Circle Award. Her most well-known work, Beloved, appeared in 1987 and won the Pulitzer Prize. Her other novels include Tar Baby (1981), Jazz
Among the themes of Morrison’s writings are the damage that racial violence brings to black cultural traditions, and the means by which African-Americans must act to preserve their heritage. Only two of her novels – Beloved (1987) and A Mercy (2008) - are set in the years of slavery. In her other works the writer shows the effects of slavery upon the psyche of black people who have never experienced it directly and suggests the idea that in order to understand the present, it is necessary to reconsider the past, embrace it, and learn how to live with it. One of the best examples that illustrates this idea is Beloved which is based on the true story of a runaway slave who, at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter, who she does not want to be sold into slavery, and is later in torment by feelings of guilt. And only when she relives and reconsiders the act of murder and finally forgives herself, she achieves liberation. Morrison’s other themes include the experiences of black women, female friendship, motherhood, clashes between blacks and whites, a black man’s violence, his irresponsibility, immorality, black racism, black people’s inferiority complex, and thus their acceptance of the models of white society and stereotypes imposed on them.

For instance, the protagonist of Morrison’s first novel The Bluest Eye (1970) Pecola is shaped by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes, as she thinks that if she becomes beautiful, she will be loved. In this novel, the author explores the influence of White ideals of beauty on black female identity showing that it may be destructive. The novel poses the questions: “What is physical beauty?”, “How do we learn to form a self-image?”, and explores the pain of wanting to be somebody else. Morrison writes: “Implicit in her desire to
have blue eyes was racial self-loathing” (Morrison, 2007, XI). One more important theme of the writer’s works is a quest for identity. Some characters (for instance, Milkman Dead in The Song of Solomon (1977)) discover their true selves in searching for their origins. Sula in the novella Sula (1973) tries to create her identity outside the community but unfortunately, fails. So, the thematic structure of Morrison’s literary works is very colorful. Her other novels include Tar Baby (1981), Jazz (1992), Paradise (1998), Love (2003), A Mercy (it deals with slavery in 17th c. America) (2008), Home (2012), God Help the Child (2015). Morrison’s nonfiction works include What Moves at the Margin (Selected Nonfiction 1971-2002), Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination (1992), The Unspeakable Things Unspoken (1988) that illuminates the ways in which African-American literature has been marginalized. In 1993 the Nobel Committee bestowed on Toni Morrison the Nobel Prize in literature – the most prestigious literary prize in the world. The lecture comes in the form of a story. It explores the uses and misuses of language and power and the interconnectedness of all people, particularly of those of different generations. She tells a story that is part of the folklore of different cultures. The story emphasizes issues that can be found in her works: the ways people of different cultures are marginalized, oppressed, and made the targets of hostility, the ways older people are treated in the same way, and the ways younger people are mistrusted.

References

Pdf The African-American Literary Tradition by Daina Miniotaitė

Sparknotes
Case Study: Toni Morison’s ‘The Bluest Eye’

7. Summary of the novel:

The novel starts by two sections’ prologue, each section has one page and they are untitled. The first section of the prologue includes three paragraphs; the first one reads like a 1940’s first grade children’s reader. The simple sentences describe a house and a family of a girl from a typical white, middle class family. The second one, is the same paragraph is repeated without punctuation, then the same paragraph is repeated again but it neither includes punctuation nor space between letters; it gives a hint about the novel as a whole, for instance Duck and Jane story inform the readers that the most part of the novel will be told from a child perspective. Also, it instructs them that The Bluest Eye will be about the larger story of how children will learn to interpret the world around them. Though we are told that the family lives in pretty house is happy family, Jane is isolated. Not only do her parents and pets refuse to play with her, but they seem to refuse any direct connection with her. The luck of connection between sentences mirrors the luck of connection between the individuals.

The novel opens in the fall of 1941, just after the great depression, in Lorain Ohio. Nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer and her 10-year-old sister, Frieda, live with their parents in an “old, cold and green” house. What they lack in money they make up for in love. The MacTeers stretches to include two new peoples, the first one is Henry Wasighton who was living with Della Jones but she become too aged and incapacitated because she has stroke. The second addition is Pecola whom the country’s province places in their home after Pecola’s father, Cholly, burns down the family house. Her brother moves in with another family and her mother stays with the white family whom she works for, thus the whole family become outdoors. Pecola is a quite, awkward girl who loves Shirely Temple, white
dolls and Mary Jane candies believing that whiteness is beautiful and that her own blackness is inherently ugly.

Pecola gets teased at school by boys, by chanting about her blackness and her father’s supposed habit of sleeping naked even though the boys themselves are black. In addition to the light-skinned girl, Maureen Peal who seems to personify enviable white qualities, she is lauded by teachers while Pecola is ignored. So she is considered as pretty and perfect unlike Pecola who is considered black and ugly. One winter day, Claudia tries to punch Maureen for making fun of Pecola but she misses and punches Pecola dead in the face instead. Junior, a young black boy from the neighborhood, lures Pecola into his house and attacks her with a cat. Later, when he kills the cat, he blames it on Pecola, causing his mother to yell at her and kick her out of the house.

In the spring of 1942, Claudia remembers when she finds her mother singing and behaving strangely, and doing that chore twice. She finds Frieda upstairs crying, and then she discovers that Henry touched Frieda’s breasts. Frieda told her parents what happened, and they attacked Henry when he returned; Frieda’s father shot at Henry and Henry ran away. Through flashback, the narrator reveals the histories of Cholly and Pauline Breedlove. Pauline has a deformed foot that has always made her feel like an outcast in her huge family. During her childhood, she is isolated from her family members; therefore, she cultivates her own pleasures losing herself in church songs and romantic fantasy. She was always imagining someone who would love her and save her. She learns about beauty from Hollywood movies and she begins to imitate white celebrities like Jean Harlow.

The narrator moves to recall Cholly’s history, where he was abandoned by his mother near train tracks when he was four days old. His aunt, Jimmy, rescues him and raises him until her death. He does not feel grief about his aunt because his family takes care of him. The
day of Jimmy’s funeral, Cholly has his first sexual experience with Darlene, a local girl. While they are having sex in a field, two white men approach them and shine a flashlight on them. They laugh at them and force them to continue having sex while they watch and laugh. Cholly and Darlene are humiliated, and Cholly is unable to direct his anger at the white men, so he turns it to Darlene instead. Later, he tries to look for his father, but when he finds him, his father rejects him. Hence, Cholly becomes cruel and he spends the next few years moving from city to another and from woman to woman. Then, he meets Pauline Williams and weds her in Kentucky and the couple moves to Lorain, Ohio, where there are more jobs. Then life becomes more difficult. Pauline feels lonely and isolated again, and Cholly’s drinking becomes a problem.

In the present, Cholly comes home drunk one day to find Pecola washing dishes. Cholly rapes her in the kitchen. When it is over, he covers her with a quilt. Pauline finds Pecola unconscious on the floor. When Pecola tells her what happened, Pauline does not believe her and beats her. Cholly rapes Pecola once again but it is unclear exactly when. Pecola becomes pregnant with her father’s child. She visits Soaphead Church; a self-declared “Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams” in Lorain’s black community, a light-skinned Wes Indian. Pecola asks him to give her blue eyes, but he tells her to give Brtha’s dog some meat, and if the dog acts strangely, she will get her wish. Pecola does not realize that Soaphead hates the dog and has given her poison to feed to it. When the dog starts to gag and limp around, she believes she will receive her blue eyes.

Claudia and Frieda learn of Pecola’s pregnancy through neighborhood gossip. Although everyone else in Lorain wants the baby to die, Claudia and Frieda pray that it survives. They spend summer planting marigold seeds in the hopes that if the flowers blossom, Pecola’s baby will survive. Pecola’s baby dies. Pauline and Pecola move to the edge
of town and Pecola begins to lose her mind. Pecola can be seen looking into the mirror, talking to herself about her blue eyes, and picking through trash.

8. Analysis of the themes

When reading Tony Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, one can understand that the novel discusses various themes and topics such as love, innocence, sex, whiteness as standard of beauty, feminism, social classes, etc. However, all those themes could be categorized under two big themes in the novel which are racism and identity.

8.1 Racism

The novel depicts two types of racism: racism of whites over blacks, and racism between blacks themselves.

8.1.1 Racism of whites over blacks:

In fact, the whole novel is based on the impact of the racist western media that considers whiteness as standard of beauty. The novel starts with the story of Dick-and-Jane narrative, and then the writer introduces the white baby doll with blue eyes who attracts the novel’s protagonist, Pecola, to the degree that she wishes to be like her having not only blue eyes, but the bluest ones. In fact, there are many scenes in the novel that depicts the racism of whites over blacks. For example, when the narrator speaks about the white girl, Maureen: “When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partner, black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet.” (Morrison, 62). Then, the narrator describes the scene when Claudia, Freida and Pecola werewith Maurine who eventually reveals her racism against them by saying: “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly.” (Morrison, 73). Another scene which depicts whites’ racism is when Mr. Yacobowski,
a white immigrant who owns the neighborhood candy store, acts in a racist way with Pecola when she goes to buy candy and he tries as much as he can to avoid any touch with Pecola:

“She holds money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand. She does not know how to move the finger of her right hand from the display counter or how to get the coins out of her left hand. Finally, he reaches over and takes the pennies from her hand, his nails graze her damp palm.” (Morrison, 50).

8.1.2 Racism of blacks over blacks:

Morrison shows how racism exists within the same race. That racism starts when the narrator informs us that Cholly Breedlove burnt the family house: “Old dog Breedlove had burned his house.” (Morrison, 17). Another scene of racism when black boys were bullying Pecola, they were screaming on her blackness and ugliness. The narrator comments on this event by saying: “It was contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their elaborately designed hopelessness.” (Morrison, 65). Then the narrator narrates Geraldine’s racism over blacks even though she is a black middle class woman. She warns her son not to deal with blacks at all: “She explains to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud.” (Morrison, 87). Hence her son, Louis Junior, invites Pecola to his beautiful house only to abuse and bully her. Then, he kills his mother’s preferable cat accusing Pecola that she is the killer. As a result, his mother humiliates Pecola in a very heavy way.

8.2 Identity

Toni Morison is the first African American women to win literature prize in 1993, she explored the emotional trauma of identity, color discrimination and she wants to reconstruct a dignified identity for the twentieth – century African American. In this novel she
addresses the history of struggles of an African American and their search for identity, she depicts the whole black community through the character of Pecola.

The Bluest Eye is meant to make the readers thinking about how much value is placed on blue eyes. Morrison illustrates Pecola’s obsession for blue eyes, through the events of Shirely Temple, White dolls, and Mary Jane candies, that show Pecola’s quest for identity just through having blue eyes. Pecola faces psychological damage done to black girl who accepts white culture’s definition of beauty, according to her whiteness which is synonymous with beauty and blackness which is ugliness and what she believes is the reason behind her being rejected everywhere.

White shopkeeper (Jacobwski), literally he does not see Pecola, and according to him she does not contain the identity of person, in the place of her personhood, there is vacuum. And he does not see Pecola because she is black and according to him there is nothing to see. So Pecola’s self and her presence as a subject, remains unrecognized by those who agree about the white standards of beauty, those people as Yacobowski absent her from the existence.

The fights between Pecola’s parents can refer to identity. They express identity in different ways, for Pecola they are the cause of negative feeling, because she wants to get her self respect while they do the opposite. So, she asked God to disappear. While for Pauline, Pecola’s mother, those fights give her identity, because she considers herself as Christian women who has worthless husband as punishment from God.

References

9. Analysis of the main characters

Pecola Breedlove

- The protagonist of the novel
- 11 years old black girl.
- Passive & mysterious character.
- Pecola is fragil and delicate child.
- She is not popular.
- She is lonely and imaginative.
- She seeks hope in her prayers for beauty.
- She has two (02) desires
  - 1-she wants to learn how to get people to love her
  - 2-When forced to witness her parent’s brutal fights, she wants to disappear neither wish is granted
- Pecola is a symbol of the black community
- Pecola's ugliness has made people around
  - her feel beautiful, her suffering has made
  - them feel comparatively lucky and her silence
  - has given them the opportunity for speaking.
- She became pregnant by her father.
• She can not longer go to school.

• She entered the world of madness.

• Pecola becomes a reminder of human suffering.

**Claudia M T**

• 9 years old girl

• narrator of the parts of the novel (02 perspectives: child & adult)

• she is considered a fighter # Pecola who is passive.

• She suffers from racism like Pecola but she has a loving family.

• She has a strong personality

• She is sensitive

• Her vision is not affected by pain # Pecola

• Her presence in the novel is very important

• She is a messenger of suffering and hope.

**Cholly Breedlove**

• Pecola's father.

• Impulsive and violent.

• He suffered early humiliation.

• He takes out his frustration on the woman in his life.

• He is capable of both tendencies and rage.
• He is not free to love and be loved

• He is free to have a sex and fight and even kill.

**Pauline Breedlove**

• Polly

• Pecola's mother.

• She is lonely and cold.

• She believes that ugly and she had a deformed foot which convince her that she is doomed to isolation .

• She is influenced by the messages conveyed by the White culture.

• She doesn't find meaning in her life ,however ;in romantic movies and in her work.

• Creates world of fantasy that separated her from family

• She believes that she is a martyr of a terrible marriage

• Her existence in the novel just as symbol of sadness as her daughter.

**Frieda Mac Teer**

• Claudia's Ten-years - old sister

• She shares Claudia's independence

• She knows more about the adult world

• She is braver than Claudia

**Mrs.Mac Teers**
• Authoritarian woman

• She loves her children unlike pecola's mother.

• She admires popular beauty norms

• She sings the blues

**Mr. Mac Teer**

• Claudia's father

• He is protective of his daughters

**Sammy Breedlove**

• Pecola's 14 year-old brother who copes with his family' problems by running away from home.

• He is active unlike his sister.

**China-Poland-Miss Marie**

• 1-Miss Marie:fat and affectionate

• 2-China :is skinny and sarcastic

• 3-Poland:is quit Girl

• pecola's neighbours

**Rosemary Villanucci**

• Wealthy white girl who makes fun of Claudia and her sister, sometimes they bit her

**Maureen peal**
• Light skinned, wealthy black girl who is new at the local school, she accepts everyone else's assumption, that she is superior and is capable of both generosity and cruelty

• She represents another kind of the black Africans in America.

Geraldine & Junior

• 1-Geraldine: a middle-class black woman who feels real affection only for her cat

• 2-Junior: is Geraldine's son, in the absence of genuine affection from his mother he becomes cruel and sadistic, he tortures the family cat and harasses children who came to the nearby playground.

Soaphead

• The dirty old man

• He associated whitness with purity & beauty

• He is the most religious character in the novel, the most immoral, stuffy, and unlikable character

10. Symbols

10.1 Blue eyes

Blue eyes symbolize the cultural beauty of America and white society. To Pecola, blue eyes symbolize the beauty and happiness that she associates with the white, middle-class world. They also come to symbolize her own blindness, for she gains blue eyes only at the cost of her sanity. The “bluest” eye could also mean the saddest eye. Furthermore, eye puns on I, in the sense that the novel’s title uses the singular form of the noun (instead of The Bluest Eyes) to express many of the characters’ sad isolation.
“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.”

The color blue can also be viewed as a color of sadness. Even though Pecola strived to have blue eyes, the reader could see her as having the saddest eyes of anyone in the novel.

10.2 The house

The novel begins with a sentence from a Dick-and-Jane narrative: “Here is the house.” Homes not only indicate socioeconomic status in this novel, but they also symbolize the emotional situations and values of the characters who inhabit them. The Breedlove apartment is miserable and decrepit, suffering from Mrs. Breedlove’s preference for her employer’s home over her own and symbolizing the misery of the Breedlove family. The MacTeer house is drafty and dark, but it is carefully tended by Mrs. MacTeer and, according to Claudia, filled with love, symbolizing that family’s comparative cohesion.

10.3 The Marigolds

Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with the safety and well-being of Pecola’s baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds represents an honest sacrifice on their part. They believe that if the marigolds they have planted grow, then Pecola’s baby will be all right. More generally, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In Pecola’s case, this cycle of renewal is perverted by her father’s rape of her.

11. Motifs

11.1 The Dick-and-Jane narrative:
The novel opens with a narrative from a Dick-and-Jane reading primer, a narrative that is distorted when Morrison runs its sentences and then its words together. The gap between the idealized, sanitized, upper-middle-class world of Dick and Jane and the often dark and ugly world of the novel is emphasized by the chapter headings excerpted from the primer. But Morrison does not mean for us to think that the Dick-and-Jane world is better—in fact, it is largely because the black characters have internalized white Dick-and-Jane values that they are unhappy. In this way, the Dick and Jane narrative and the novel provide ironic commentary on each other.

11.2 The seasons and nature

The novel is divided into the four seasons, but it pointedly refuses to meet the expectations of these seasons. For example, spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal and it is the season when Pecola is raped. Pecola’s baby dies in autumn, the season of harvesting. Morrison uses natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters’ experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether “the earth itself might have been unyielding” to someone like Pecola.

11.3 Whiteness and color

In the novel, whiteness is associated with beauty and cleanliness (particularly according to Geraldine and Mrs. Breedlove), but also with sterility. In contrast, color is associated with happiness. Morrison uses this imagery to emphasize the destructiveness of the black community’s privileging of whiteness and to suggest that vibrant color, rather than the pure absence of color, is a stronger image of happiness and freedom.
11.4   Eyes and vision

Pecola is obsessed with having blue eyes because she believes that this mark of conventional, white beauty will change the way that she is seen and therefore the way that she sees the world. There are continual references to other characters’ eyes as well—for example, Mr. Yacobowski’s hostility to Pecola resides in the blankness in his own eyes, as well as in his inability to see a black girl. This motif underlines the novel’s repeated concern for the difference between how we see and how we are seen, and the difference between superficial sight and true insight.

References

SparkNotes