For Michiko Hakutani
and my late parents
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This book was initially conceived when I was exploring the relationships between Japanese poetics and the modernism of W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. While Yeats’s symbolism was influenced by his cross-cultural visions of noh theatre and Irish folklore, Pound’s imagism had its origin in classic haiku. It was Margaret Walker, who intimately knew Richard Wright, who first stated that Wright was interested in Pound among other modernist poets. As Ralph Ellison emulated Yeats along with other Western modernists, Wright in his later career became acquainted with haiku and Zen philosophy in his associations with the Beat poets living in Paris in the mid 1950s. I found not only that Lacan’s concept of human subjectivity is extremely helpful to understanding the aesthetic principles involved in haiku composition, but also that Lacanian psychoanalysis has a strong affinity to Zen philosophy.

The present study also developed from my attempts to show, in Part I, “American Dialogues,” that Richard Wright and James Baldwin were inspired by Theodore Dreiser and Henry James, respectively, the two most influential modern American novelists, who were poles apart in their worldviews and techniques. From time to time Wright stated that Dreiser was the greatest writer American culture had produced, just as Dostoevsky was for Russian culture. Wright modeled Black Boy after Jennie Gerhardt, which he considered Dreiser’s best novel. Small wonder that Baldwin first regarded Wright as his mentor but soon took issue with him in describing African American experience, just as James and Dreiser were diametrically opposed in their social and cultural visions. In gauging the narrative techniques of modern African American writers, I have found Bakhtin’s dialogic imagination, as well as his concept of the subject, most useful.

Part II, “European and African Cultural Visions,” examines what Wright called “universal humanism,” what is common among all cultures. This ideology, as expressed by Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin alike, transcends race, class, and culture. Chapter 6 on Wright’s The Outsider is intended to show how differently universal humanism is expressed by a European existentialist like Camus and by Wright, an African American counterpart. Part II also explores what Wright calls “the African’s primal outlook upon life,” the most
distinct African cultural vision that appears in Wright’s later work, as well as in Toni Morrison’s novels. I suggest that Wright’s exile in France and his travels to West Africa and Spain transformed his understanding of African American experience. And subsequent African American writers, often regarded as postmodernists and postcolonialists, produced their works under the strong influence of the cross-cultural visions Wright had acquired in Europe and Africa. Although modernism and postmodernism in African American literature from time to time bear marked differences in their perspectives and characteristics, the two movements, sharing the same cross-cultural visions, are contiguous and evolving.

Part III, “Eastern and African American Cross-Cultural Visions,” investigates the impacts of Eastern philosophy and religion on modern and postmodern African American literature. Whereas Wright’s earlier work is characterized by Marxism, his later work reflects Eastern cultural visions. Like Yeats and Pound, Wright was fascinated with Japanese poetics, as seen in his massive haiku. Along with Wright’s haiku, I have discussed the haiku written by Sonia Sanchez and James Emanuel. Part III also discusses the influences of Buddhism and Zen philosophy, in particular, not only on African American haiku poets but also on Alice Walker.

I hasten to add that what I have tried to demonstrate in this book represents some preliminary markers for more detailed future studies. My attempts here are heuristic and my observations are not conclusive. There are also several omissions in reading contemporary African American writers whose works thrive on their cross-cultural visions, such as Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Charles Johnson, and haiku poet Lenard D. Moore.
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many writers and sources, as acknowledged in the notes and works cited. I would like to thank, in particular, the late John Reilly, the late Philip Gerber, Robert Tener, Wilfred Samuels, Heather Lee Miller, and the anonymous readers for The Ohio State University Press, who have read part or whole of the manuscript and offered useful, constructive suggestions.

Over the years the Kent State University Research Council has provided several research leaves and travel grants, and I am grateful for their support.

The publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940 marks an epoch in the development of African American literature in modern times. In discussing the historical importance of the book, Irving Howe wrote in 1963, “The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed for ever.” In the abolitionist era, African American writers often addressed themselves to audiences they expected would be largely European American. Before Wright, however, they primarily addressed African American audiences. If they had written for European American audiences, they would have been expected to present stereotyped pictures of African Americans. Exceptions like W. E. B. Du Bois and Charles W. Chesnutt were largely unheeded, for African Americans, as Wright observed, “possessed deep-seated resistance against the Negro problem being presented even verbally, in all its hideous dullness, in all the totality of its meaning.” It was somewhat miraculous that both African and European Americans believed what they read in *Native Son*, in which Wright destroys the white myth of the patient, humorous, subservient black man.

One assumes Wright to be in the tradition of American naturalism. In *Black Boy* (1945), Wright states that he was inspired by Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) and *Sister Carrie* (1900): “It would have been impossible for me to have told anyone what I derived from these novels, for it was nothing less than a sense of life itself. All my life had shaped me for the realism, the naturalism of the modern novel, and I could not read enough of them.” Such testimony, however, merely tells Wright’s youthful taste in books; it hardly proves that he became a doctrinaire naturalist. To what extent he is part of American naturalism has become an issue about Wright’s work. In *Native Son* does Wright subscribe to the novel’s implicit assumption that American racial conditions are directly responsible for the oppression of African Americans? Recent criticism has modified or refuted the naturalistic reading, suggesting that Wright and his fellow American writers went beyond naturalism.
The pessimistic determinism often associated with naturalism had shown African American writers, such as Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, the meaning of racial oppression. Victims of oppression themselves, these writers by necessity directed their energy toward rebellion. While they escaped the pessimistic outlook of naturalism, their respect for the philosophy of naturalism helped them develop their own versions of human subjectivity and endow their characters with self-determination. Self-pity and rage alone would not have impressed modern readers. As these writers moved beyond anger and protest, they developed a new concern for character and literary discipline, seeking a deeper involvement in the world of philosophy and discourse. Naturalism showed them how to determine the position of human beings in the world; existentialism showed them how to liberate their fellow human beings from the strictures imposed on them.

Naturalism meant that human behavior is solely under the control of heredity and social environment. Just as American realist writers like Mark Twain and Theodore Dreiser had taken issue with naturalistic determinism, African American writers were diametrically opposed to the concept of human subjectivity as demonstrated by a novelist like Emile Zola. In deterministic naturalism, the major character in a novel or an autobiography, falling victim to his or her heredity and social environment, those forces external to the person, fails to achieve his or her subjectivity. With *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Wright proved to the literary public that not only do Bigger Thomas and the young Richard Wright overcome the forces, but they also succeed in achieving subjectivity.

As *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, and their predecessor *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938–39) were making a revolutionary impact on African American literary criticism, Wright was also producing their two subtexts, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937) and *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941). These works, involving not only Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin but also liberal critics such as Irving Howe, turned out to be a beginning of the African American literary debate that was to shape the subsequent African American literature. Given a patriotic climate of the war years, *12 Million Black Voices* betrays the tensions between Wright's Marxism and his concept of American democracy. Wright tries to reconcile the modern, industrial working-class culture of African Americans and its subsequent class antagonism with the Popular Front emphasis on the progressive American democracy. "We black folk, our history and our present being," Wright declares, "are a mirror of all the manifold experiences of America. What we want, what we represent, what we endure is what America is.”

In “Blueprint,” on the other hand, such tensions are absent. Rather than
viewing African American writing in the light of Marxism and class consciousness, Wright tries to define African American modernism in terms of its own themes and points of view. As he theorizes in this manifesto, his own earliest work serves as a model for the African American writer who “is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die.” Such writing, Wright argues, is endowed with a consciousness that draws on the fluid, historically influential “lore of a great people.” “Reduced to its simplest and most general terms,” he asserts, “theme for Negro writers will rise from understanding the meaning of their being transplanted from the ‘savage’ to a ‘civilized’ culture in all of its social, political, economic, and emotional implications.” By “savage culture,” Wright means the proud origin of black peoples in Africa, as well as the history of slavery in the South.

Even the incipient stage in the development of African American modernism was buttressed by this cross-cultural vision. In “Blueprint,” one of the theoretical principles calls for the African American writer to explore universal humanism, what is common among all cultures. “Every iota of grain in human thought and sensibility,” Wright argues, “should be ready grist for his mill, no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications.” Universal humanism, Wright observes, transcends race, class, and culture. The presentation of such cultural and cross-cultural visions “should be simple, yes; but the complexity, the strangeness, the magic, the wonder of life that plays like a bright sheen over the most sordid existence should be there. To borrow a phrase from the Russians, it should have a complex simplicity.”

Like Wright, Ellison was deeply involved with the issues of race, but, as his masterpiece Invisible Man (1952) exhibits, Ellison succeeded, with his skill and imagination, in making what is racial and regional into what is humanistic and universal. At the outset of his career, following Wright’s lead in Marxism, as stated in “Blueprint,” Ellison also argued that the rhetorical and political devices of proletarian fiction were the means by which to advance a radical black literature. His first publication, a review of Waters Edward Turpin’s These Low Grounds, appeared with “Blueprint” in New Challenge in 1937, closely reflecting Wright’s views: the African American racial or nationalist expression by a Marxist writer entails an inherent class consciousness.

A series of book reviews Ellison published in New Masses in 1940 still reflected a Marxist perspective as defined in “Blueprint.” In “Stormy Weather,” a review of Langston Hughes’s autobiography The Big Sea (1940), Ellison tried to make Hughes the chief spokesperson of the literary movement that distanced itself from the accommodationist aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance and leaned toward a revolutionary black literature.
Ellison assailed the New Negro writers as proponents of a black middle class which had become self-conscious through the economic alliances it had made in supporting World War I. The work of the New Negro writers was politically influenced by the black middle-class interests and failed to express the painful experiences of the black masses. Ellison realized that “white faddists” were perpetuating the image of the black American as “primitive and exotic,” a deceptively racist perception that signifies the spiritual and moral decay of the postwar period. It looked as though the same white men were paying these African American writers to contain the working-class militancy prompted by the riots and lynchings during World War I by championing the passive black middle class.

Wright and Ellison were trying to lure Hughes, the leader in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, to their camp under the banner of Marxist and proletarian writing. During the 1930s, as his well-known poems such as “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921), “The Weary Blues” (1926), and “I, Too” (1932) powerfully expressed the deep-seated feelings of the African American masses, Hughes’s voice resounded with those of Wright and Ellison. Of the three, Wright was the only one who was formally and actively involved in the activities of the Communist Party, attending the John Reed Club meetings. However, not only were all three comrades in action; they were also united in the cause of African American modernism.

By the time his 12 Million Black Voices appeared in 1941, Wright was still interested in Marxist theory but became disenchanted with its practice by the American Communist Party. Similarly, Ellison’s enthusiasm for Marxism began to decline. Instead of relying on Wright’s Marxist views and democratic principles, expressed in 12 Million Black Voices, Ellison’s theory of the black folk focused on a transformation of African Americans from their Southern roots to the Northern industrial environment. As his reviews in the early 1940s indicate, Ellison ultimately disputed with Wright, who predicted in 12 Million Black Voices that the folk in the city would decline and that a working-class and “modern” consciousness would rise. Ellison’s writings also intimate his opposition to Gunnar Myrdal’s sociological study, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy (1944). Ellison questioned Myrdal’s premise that “blackness” in American culture is the result of white oppression. Myrdal tried to demonstrate that this “blackness” is “a distorted development” and “a pathological condition” of American culture. Myrdal posits that while European Americans resolve the problems of race, African Americans will be assimilated into American culture.

Wright, on the other hand, revisiting his Chicago school of sociology, was drawn to Myrdal’s study. By 1945, attempting to reinvent himself from a
post-Marxist point of view, Wright agreed with Myrdal in rejecting a Marxist analysis of racial problems in America. As his introduction to St. Clair Drake's and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis* (1945) indicates, Wright supported Myrdal's observations of African American culture: a large African American population is defeated by its “crude and brutal” experience in the industrial North. By contrast, Ellison saw African Americans’ ability and will to create cultural forms: folklore, art, music, and literature. For Ellison, African American cultural forms also subsume the critique of Myrdal’s “higher” American culture and the rejection of “white patterns.” Calling for deeper cultural forms than those sociologists and Marxists had found, Ellison found them in the emerging culture of the black working folk in the industrial North. He argued that the cultural forms of the black dance halls in the Northern cities—the blues, jazz, dance, and dress—were proof of modern African American culture: the traditional folk culture existing in the present, as Invisible Man declares that “a whole unrecorded history is spoken.”

Despite their differences in perspective as evident in the early 1940s, by the mid 1940s Wright and Ellison had come to share the fundamental tenets of African American culture. The fruits of their labor were shown in their respective writings in the war years and the late 1940s, but modern African American literature reached its apogee with the appearance of Wright’s *Black Boy* (1945). It is this book, subtitled *A Record of Childhood and Youth*, that not only Ellison and his fellow African American writers but a host of modern European American writers like Dreiser praised and regarded as a model of writing. Ellison disagreed with Wright in theory but agreed with him in practice.

Today *Black Boy* is acclaimed not only as the finest autobiography written by an African American but as one of the finest autobiographies written in America. In fact, many American autobiographies are ethnic and cross-cultural. As *Black Boy* discusses the experience of an African American youth who grew up in the South, Dreiser’s *Dawn* (1931) treats the life struggle that the son of a German immigrant faced in the North. Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1771–90) is not ethnic in the usual sense of the word, but as an important cross-cultural document for the young nation, it directly concerns American and European cultures. Franklin’s life exemplifies the American dream of a poor boy who made good in Pennsylvania, an English colony. What these autobiographies have in common is not only an eloquent portrayal of early life but a poignant expression of cross-cultural visions.

From another perspective, Wright’s portrayals of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and the young self in *Black Boy* thrive on what Mikhail Bakhtin called “a dialogic imagination.” As Wright explains in his introduction to *Native Son,*
“How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” the hero of the novel does not merely express his subjectivity; he is representative of all others like him. In *Black Boy*, Wright uses the young self as a mask: the attitudes and sentiments expressed by the young Wright are not totally his own but represent the responses of those he calls “the voiceless Negro boys” of the South. The liberal critics were all in agreement that the book’s chief value lies in leading the nation on the road to emancipation. Of all the reviews, Lionel Trilling’s “A Tragic Situation” was most thorough. Granted, *Black Boy* was a most accurate account of misery and oppression published to that date, but Trilling observed that the book does not let its readers make “the moral ‘escape’ that can be offered by accounts of suffering and justice.” What underlies the power and effect of Wright’s book is not his personal experience, but his moral and intellectual power, as derived from others by dialogic imagination. Trilling suggested that Wright “does not make himself that different kind of human being, a ‘sufferer.’ His is not an object, he is a subject; he is the same kind of person as his reader, as complex, as free.” What Trilling meant by “a subject” is an individual free of the ego of the subject, an individual representative of all others. Paradoxically, Wright converts the concept of subjectivity to that of objectivity: what Bigger Thomas or the young Wright expresses as the subject is what anyone like him does. Bakhtin theorized and demonstrated, as did Lacan, that the subject is not unique, nor is it different from the other.

In the development of modern African American fiction, the early 1950s marks an important turning point. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* thrives on a set of symbols with conscious allusions to American history and ideology. Ellison’s vision, like Wright’s, is not that of Invisible Man, the subject, but is representative of others. Like *Black Boy*, *Invisible Man* is deeply concerned with the development of an African American youth into maturity. Evoking the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests Ellison’s serious concern with W. E. B. Du Bois’s sense of double-consciousness, what Ellison calls himself in an essay “a Negro and an American, a member of the family and yet an outsider.” In search of identity in American society, however, Ellison’s vision focuses not only on broader culture and history, but on deeper self-realization. Wright’s less successful *The Outsider* (1953), on the other hand, is considered an existential novel, which was in vogue in Europe in the aftermath of World War II. In contrast to French existentialists like Sartre and Camus, Wright is as profoundly concerned in this novel with the dilemma of double consciousness as is Ellison in *Invisible Man*. But, portraying the highly educated, mature intellectuals, Cross Damon and Invisible Man, both novels express the goal of modern African American novelists whose efforts have been to make their characters representative of others and universalize their cultural visions.
A third major African American novel, appearing in the early 1950s, James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), portrays Baldwin's early life replete with personal, familial, racial, and social turmoil, a raw experience that is mute in *Invisible Man* and *The Outsider*. Although Baldwin held in the highest regard Wright's *Black Boy* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* among African American books, he emulated Dostoevsky for his dialectic technique and Henry James for his impressionism. Baldwin met Wright, who, reading part of the manuscript of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, encouraged him. This novel, much like *Black Boy*, is an autobiographical portrait of John Grimes, an African American youth in search of identity in racist society. Distinct from *Black Boy*, however, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* creates, in particular, the protagonist's sexual identity and guilt, as well as his ambivalent relationships with his parents.

Baldwin's most influential social and literary criticisms are collected in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955). Focusing on the problems of race in American society, he discusses literature of anti-slavery from Stowe to Wright, as well as his own experiences in America and Europe. Earlier Baldwin regarded Wright as his mentor but soon rebelled against him. Calling Bigger Thomas a descendant of Uncle Tom, Baldwin argued that *Native Son* "suggested a revolution of racial conflict that was merely the liberal dream of good will in which blacks would obliterate their personalities and become as whites." Baldwin disagreed with Wright's use of violence, which he called "gratuitous and compulsive because the root of the violence is never explained." Baldwin applauded Wright's courageous representation of the African American "rage," but to him the novelist must analyze raw emotion and transform it into an identifiable human experience. Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), like *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, is his major achievement. Although *Giovanni's Room* was not written in the tradition of literary naturalism, it represents the author's attempt to write a Zolaesque experimental novel. Baldwin focuses on real characters taken from life: David, a bisexual white American; his fiancée Hella, a white American; and Giovanni, David's male homosexual lover. The story closely represents Hella's painful discovery of a mystery of human sexuality. *Another Country* (1962), a controversial novel, is nonetheless his most ambitious work. Whereas his experiment in *Giovanni's Room* involves only white characters and society, *Another Country* conducts an experiment on a variety of interracial and sexual relationships. *Another Country* comprises the four narratives interrelated at certain points in the novel. Most of the events are perhaps too carefully arranged, but Rufus's tragic suicide and Vivaldo and Ida's reconciliation are depicted with great compassion and understanding. Like Wright's and Ellison's novels, Baldwin's also thrive on a dialogic imagination that derives from the clashing interactions between the subject and others.
Two of Baldwin’s later novels, *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968) and *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), both explore the life of an African American artist. *Tell Me* is autobiographical, like Wright’s *Black Boy*, and is lacking in precipitous events and actions, but through flashbacks it subtly conveys harrowing experiences of a middle-aged actor. *Beale Street*, unlike Baldwin’s other novels, explores heterosexuality. This novel celebrates the love relationship of an African American couple consciously aware of the primacy of love over any racial or social obstacles and able to revive their genuine relationship and attain their deliverance. The ultimate domain of love, as Baldwin has shown throughout his work, is governed by the individuality of two human beings’ deepest emotions that transcends their sexual orientation. Baldwin showed with all his heart and soul, as his American predecessors had scarcely done, that homosexuality is just as normal as is heterosexuality: here lies his greatest contribution to modern American fiction.

In subject matter and form, African American modernism, represented by Hughes, Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin, has an affinity with Anglo-American modernism. In fact, both groups of writers sought traditions, myths, and legends. In *The Waste Land* (1922), T. S. Eliot adapts the symbolic framework of the medieval Grail legend and other older fertility rites in contrast to the sordidness and sterility of modern life in the West. In creating Yoknapatawpha County, William Faulkner ponders the rise and fall of the genteel culture of the old Civil War South. For their subjects, Hughes and Wright respectively enlightened their heritages in an ancient river like the Congo and an ancient kingdom like the Ashanti and their religiosity and cosmology. For their techniques and styles, Hughes and Ellison both emulated the spirit, lyricism, and individualism that characterize the evolution of African American music from spirituals and gospel through the blues to jazz. Modern jazz today is a cross-cultural hybrid of African American and Western music.

One of the striking differences between Anglo-American and African American modernists has much to do with their attitudes toward their crafts. Hughes, for instance, advocated an aesthetic of simplicity and, like Whitman, voices of democracy. All in all, African American modernists shunned an elitist attitude which Western modernists at times betrayed. George Orwell deplored Western modernists’ indifference to content and their preoccupation with form. “Our eyes,” he wrote, “are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the subconscious, to the solar plexus—to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening.” This formalism in the 1920s was regarded by many as the logical aesthetic for modernist writing. Western modernists believed that their art
offers a privileged insight into reality and at the same time, because art creates its own reality, it is not at all concerned with commonplace reality: art is an autonomous activity.

While Anglo-American modernists like Pound, Eliot, Hemingway, and Faulkner conveyed their personal, subjective visions with privileged sensibility, African American counterparts like Hughes, Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin, as well as later African American writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, were intent on conveying their universal visions, their worldviews informed of other cultures. Despite the sentiments of fragmentation and alienation that both groups of American writers generated, they tried to redeem themselves through the creation of art. Man acts, as Heidegger observed, “as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact, language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is above all else man’s subversion of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation.”

To overcome alienation, postmodernists have attempted to integrate themselves with the worlds of others, the phenomena taking place in other fields of knowledge and in other cultures and traditions. If modernism is characterized by shifting the burden of knowledge from the rational to the aesthetic, postmodernism is viewed as refining the rational in terms of the phenomenal. While modernism, especially Western modernism, smacks of elitism, postmodernism, as shown by the later Wright, Walker, and Morrison, is widely concerned not only with the mundane but also with other kinds of knowledge and other cultures. The postmodern characteristics attributable to late Wright, Walker, and Morrison, however, are radically different from those of the postmodern texts by such writers as Amiri Baraka and Ishmael Reed.

As most postmodernists try to situate themselves in the contemporary world, some modernists gauge their world in relation to past culture. To Eliot, present culture is an embodied experience of the present arising from the contiguous transformation of the past. Most modernists are opposed to absolute polarities in human experience. Victorians and some early modernists like Henry James and W. B. Yeats, by contrast, had a penchant for the dichotomy of masculine and feminine, object and subject, the higher and the lower, the earlier and the later, present and past, time and place. On the contrary, late modernists like James Joyce, and postmodernists in particular, explore the notion of integrating the opposites. They view the opposites as convenient ways of discussing present phenomena, which, upon closer observation, reveal themselves to be related to one another or to be functions of one another.

Postmodernists, moreover, tend to parody past art, refrain from all
absolutes, and deconstruct established images and ideas. Unlike Pound, who in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” laments over a culture filled with “mendacities” and “the classics in paraphrase,” a postmodernist is inclined to deal with copies more seriously than with originals. As a deconstructor, a postmodernist is fascinated not by the signified but by their “free signifiers.” Postmodern writers, as in contemporary visual arts, refuse to acknowledge any limits to the world of imaginary representation, whether it is a psychologically autonomous entity or a physically constructed realm fully integrated with the world of historical experience. The predominant modes of postmodernism are not as controlled and disciplined as those of modernism: the postmodern modes of expression tend to be ironic, parodic, digressive, and complex.

The hermeneutic reading of the text, however, eventually manifests the fundamental difference between the two modes of writing. As most critics have noted, postmodernism is characterized by the decentered text. The postmodern text deals with oppositions, what Jacques Derrida calls *différance*. In each signifying text, internal conflicts develop independently of the author, the supposedly central informant. Consequently the text deconstructs itself because of the oppositional and conflictual nature of language. Because the *différance* is at work in the text, the author, let alone the reader, can scarcely claim absolute authority over a given text; hence there arises a structural impossibility of imposing a central idea, a summary, or a conclusion to the text. It is for this reason that many postmodern texts incorporate segments of mass culture and late capitalism and draw on parodic forms in order to minimize autonomy, self-referentiality, and centralized vision. Postmodern texts, then, are said to denote a fundamental loss of rational and ontological certainty.

The lack of center and the recognition of gaps and oppositions that characterize the postmodern text suggest that postmodernists are bent on abolishing marginality and extending referentiality in their text. As postmodern texts, such as Wright’s *The Color Curtain* (1956) and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1989), reveal, their visions and dialogues have come to include relations not only between East and West, Old and New, but between the First, Second, and Third Worlds within as well as across national cultures. The conflict between Rushdie’s postmodern satirism and the ancient Muslim dogma, as fictionalized in *The Satanic Verses*, and the clash between left and right, race and religion, as depicted in *The Color Curtain*, are dramatic examples of postmodern cross-culturalism, just as are the recent international challenges to South African apartheid and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. This cross-culturalism, however, finds its origin in a much earlier period. One of
the idiosyncrasies of Victorian thought was Western chauvinism. As late as the middle of the twentieth century, as Wright argued in *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954), the West was perceived as an advanced culture while Africans were regarded as primitive. Victorian intellectuals respected Chinese and Indian societies, which represented ancient cultures, but they considered these societies decadent and backward. Rudyard Kipling deemed it the moral duty of the West to help the nonwhite races of the world.

More recently, postmodernist critics in the West, such as Roland Barthes and Derrida, have viewed Japanese culture as decentered. Because they define modernist writing as structural, systematic, and rational, they theorize that Japanese culture is essentially postmodern. Barthes argues and illustrates that Japan is a decentered culture in which the Buddhist state of *mu*, nothingness, represents the lack of a privileged *Signified* behind what he calls the “empire of signs.” Modernism, as well as romanticism, suppressed a decentered culture and the very margins in a culture which have come to gain power in postmodernist writing. Such margins are converted to signs of power, and these signs are used to reshape the ostensibly fixed material world of history and produce new and more humane identities for human beings.

As a result, the power of language in postmodernism operates in contrast to the function of language in realism. Realistic language, which functions as a mirror, conveys a common view by suppressing contradictory voices; it reflects the commonly experienced world outside the text. That is, experience is prior to language. In postmodern writing, language, though often derived from experience, has its own power and development independent of experience. Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), for example, shows that Celie’s voice realistically echoes racist experience but simultaneously reflects what Wright calls in *Black Power* “a primal African attitude.” Celie laments that cutting a young tree is like cutting her own arm. Walker’s text is reminiscent of Wright’s: Wright was fascinated by the African reverence for nonhuman beings, a primal African philosophy that corresponds to the Buddhist belief. Both *The Color Purple* and *Black Power* as postmodern texts poignantly express the cross-cultural vision that humankind is not at the center of the universe.

Another postmodern text conducive to a cross-cultural reading is Wright’s *Pagan Spain* (1957). In this text, anomalies appear on the surface of the text: Spain looks like a Christian as well as a Pagan society. Wright’s discourse conveys such a message on the surface, but on the same surface it contains anomalies, or “gaps,” which, when taken into account, are found to conflict with and put into question what is signified. These gaps exist on the virtual margins of the text, but as the reader focuses on the gaps, the text begins to
deconstruct itself. The gaps spread and immerse themselves throughout the text. For example, the Black Virgin at Montserrat, an established symbol of Catholicism, becomes a powerful signifier, a text that systematically deconstructs itself before the reader’s expectant eyes. In sharp contrast to the male principle of life, for which Christianity stands, Spanish religiosity underscores the female principle of life the Virgin signifies.

Such a reading leads to the basic assumption of a feminist criticism that there are innate differences between men and women and, further, that women are inherently superior, as Pagan Spain reveals that Spanish women are the pillar of Spanish culture. Julia Kristeva, a contemporary champion of feminist writing and a follower of Lacanian psychoanalysis, was fascinated with medieval Chinese womanhood when she visited northern Chinese villages in the late 1980s, just as Wright admired Spanish womanhood when he traveled to Spain in the mid 1950s. A postmodern reading of Pagan Spain, then, is to restore the matriarchal power in an earlier culture, which merely existed in the margins of the premodern text. Not only has postmodern writing subverted the premodern text by shifting the margins to the center of the text, but the decentric mode of writing has also produced the effect of collapsing and destroying the time-honored oppositions: male and female, fact and fiction, civilized and indigenous, colonial and postcolonial, East and West, America and Europe.

The most influential East-West artistic, cultural, and literary exchange that has taken place in modern and postmodern times was reading and writing of haiku. Among others, Richard Wright distinguished himself as a haiku poet by writing over 4,000 haiku in his last eighteen months of his life while in exile in Paris. Between Wright’s death in 1960 and the publication of Haiku: This Other World (1998), a collection of the 817 selected by Wright, only twenty-three of them had appeared in some journals and books, but the entire manuscripts of Wright’s haiku have been available for study since 1990. Since 1998, in particular, Wright’s haiku have made an impact on some of the contemporary American poets, most notably Robert Haas, Sonia Sanchez, and James Emanuel. Robert Haas, U.S. Poet Laureate 1995–97, wrote in The Washington Post: “Here’s a surprise, a book of haiku written in his last years by the fierce and original American novelist Richard Wright. . . . What an outpouring!”

Back in 1955 Wright attended the Bandung Conference of the Third World; two years later he was a member of the First Congress of Negro Artists and Writers, which met in Paris in September. During that same period he liked to work in his garden on his Normandy farm, an activity that supplied many themes for his haiku. Of his experience in this period, Wright's travel
to the newly independent Ghana in West Africa had a great impact on his writing of haiku. The African philosophy of life Wright witnessed among the Ashanti, “the African primal outlook upon life,” as he called it, served as an inspiration for his poetic sensibility.

The decade of the 1950s was rich in possibilities for Wright. The Third World was coming into its own artistically, socially, and politically. But set against this positive cultural climate were the effects of his financial and personal problems. By the beginning of 1959 he was sick and confined to his bed. In the introduction to *Haiku: This Other World*, Wright's daughter Julia Wright, then an eighteen-year-old Sorbonne student of sociology, writes:

But, the wound that went the deepest, the piece of news that hit him by far the hardest, was the death of his mother, Ella, in January 1959, the very same month a writer he highly admired, Albert Camus, was killed in an automobile accident. . . . The haiku enabled him to mourn a mother whose physical absence from his life had begun way before her death. . . . A form of poetry which links seasons of the soul with nature's cycle of moods enabled him to reach out to the black part of himself still stranded in a South that continued to live in his dreams. With the haiku, a self-nurturing could begin albeit so close to his own death.

Wright was approaching the end of the decade in an ambivalent mood ready for union with that which lies beyond the artist, a theme appropriate for haiku. Exhausted by his sickness and the polemic drain on his rational powers, he was mentally and emotionally receptive to the ideas, beauty, and form of haiku under the influence of R. H. Blyth and his Zen concepts, as well as of African philosophy.

Unlike the other sects of Buddhism, Zen teaches that every individual possesses Buddhahood and all he or she must do is to realize it. One must purge one's mind and heart of any materialistic thoughts or feelings and appreciate the wonder of the world here and now. Zen is a way of self-discipline and asceticism. Its emphasis on self-denial is derived from the prophetic admonishment Gautama Buddha is said to have given to his disciples: “Seek within, you are the Buddha.” Zen's emphasis on self-enlightenment is analogous to Emersonian transcendentalism, in which an individual is taught to discipline the self and look within, for divinity resides not only in nature but in human beings.

In contrast to Zen, however, Emerson defines human enlightenment as the subject's consciousness of the over-soul. In “The Over-Soul,” Emerson describes this state of mind as a boundless sphere in which “there is no screen
or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens.” No sooner does the consciousness of the subject disappear than the over-soul appears on the scene. As Emerson writes, “[M]an, the effect ceases, and God, the cause, begins.” To Emerson, the over-soul is so pervasive “a light [that it] shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.” In his essay “Nature,” this light is so powerful that one becomes “a transparent eyeball” which cannot see beyond one’s state of mind. In Zen, one is taught to annihilate this eyeball before satori is attained: satori is the achievement of mu, nothingness. The state of nothingness is free of human subjectivity; it is so completely free of any thought or emotion that such a consciousness, or “the unconscious” in psychoanalytical terms, corresponds to the state of nature. Unlike a Zen master, Emerson seems to empower God to conquer human subjects while allowing them to cling to their subjectivity.

In Zen, if the enlightened person sees a tree, for instance, the person sees the tree through his or her enlightened eye. The tree is no longer an ordinary tree; it now exists with different meaning. In other words, the tree contains satori only when the viewer is enlightened. From a similar point of view, Wright saw in African life, as reported in Black Power, a closer relationship between human beings and nature than that between human beings and their social and political environment:

Africa, with its high rain forest, with its stifling heat and lush vegetation, might well be mankind’s queerest laboratory. Here instinct ruled and flowered without being concerned with the nature of the physical structure of the world; man lived without too much effort; there was nothing to distract him from concentrating upon the currents and countercurrents of his heart. He was thus free to project out of himself what he thought he was. Man has lived here in a waking dream, and, to some extent, he still lives here in that dream.

Africa evokes in one “a total attitude toward life, calling into question the basic assumptions of existence,” just as Zen teaches one a way of life completely independent of what one has been socially and politically conditioned to lead. As if echoing the enlightenment in Zen, Wright says: “Africa is the world of man; if you are wild, Africa’s wild; if you are empty, so’s Africa.”

Wright’s analysis of the African concept of life is also suggestive of Zen’s emphasis on transcending the dualism of life and death. Zen master Dogen (1200–1254), whose treatise Shobogenzo is known in Japan for his practical application rather than his theory of Zen doctrine, observed that since life and death are beyond human control, there is no need to avoid them. Dogen’s
teaching is a refutation of the assumption that life and death are entirely separate entities as are seasons or day and night. To Freud, the unconscious includes a death instinct, an instinct in opposition to libido—an instinct to turn into elements in opposition to reproduction of organisms. To Lacan, the death instinct is not “an admission of impotence, it isn’t coming to a halt before an irreducible, an ineffable last thing, it is a concept.” Lacan takes issue with Freud, for Freud defines death as the opposite of life: the pleasure principle underlying life is opposed to the death wish, which “tends to reduce all animate things to the inanimate.” Lacan, on the other hand, defines this change from life to death as “human experience, human interchanges, intersubjectivity.” Lacan’s concept of death, then, has a strong resemblance to Dogen’s.

The funeral service Wright saw in an Ashanti community, reported in *Black Power,* showed him that “the ‘dead’ live side by side with the living; they eat, breathe, laugh, hate, love, and continue doing in the world of ghostly shadows exactly what they had been doing in the world of flesh and blood,” a portrayal of life and death reminiscent of Philip Freneau’s “The Indian Burying Ground” and, more recently, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved.* In Freneau’s poem, the Native Americans bury their dead in a sitting posture. Like the dead Ashanti, the buried man continues to be involved in his life activities after death: “His imaged bird, and painted bowl, / And venison, for a journey dressed, / Bespeak the nature of the soul, / Activity, that knows no rest.” Freneau’s images, like haiku images, function as representations of intersubjectivity instead of subjectivity. The dead man’s “imaged birds, and painted bowl” do not convey Freneau’s ideas, although these images are what Freneau as a subject sees. Because the images express the Indian’s ideas, the images constitute the reflections of another subject.

Wright was, moreover, fascinated by the African reverence for the nonhuman living, a primal African attitude which corresponds to the Buddhist belief. He observed in *Black Power* that the pre-Christian African, like a Buddhist, was impressed with the littleness of a human being. The concept of unity, continuity, and infinity underlying that of life and death is what the Akan religion and Buddhism share. Wright’s reading of the African mind conforms to both religions in their common belief that not only are human beings unable to occupy the center of the universe; they are merely an infinitesimal fraction of time and space. The Akan religion and Buddhism both de-emphasize human subjectivity. It is this revelatory and emulating relationship which nature holds for human beings that makes the African primal outlook upon life akin to Zen Buddhism.

With the advent of postmodern writing, American culture with its economic and political influences across the shores is bent on Americanizing the
world but at the same time is trying to globalize it. Perhaps the most positive lesson of the cross-cultural visions, as strongly reflected in African American literature, is that seeing human existence can be achieved in ways which do not necessarily assert the self by excluding the other: truth is often a revelation from the other. However historically different their ideas and representations may have been, both African American modernists and postmodernists have mediated upon the possibility of multiple worlds for human subjectivity.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1:
The Chicago Renaissance, Theodore Dreiser, and Richard Wright’s Spatial Narrative

1. Among African American works, perhaps the most successful effort to fictionalize that memory was made by Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (1987).

2. Dreiser, a son of a poor immigrant, spoke only German in his early childhood. Farrell, who grew up in the Irish-American neighborhoods of Chicago, drew on his early experience in *Studs Lonigan*; both Farrell and Wright were influenced by Dreiser as they influenced each other. Algren, who was also closely associated with Wright, wrote *Never Come Morning*, which Wright said, “deals with Polish life”; praising Algren’s work, Wright called it “as hard hitting a realistic piece of writing as you will ever read.” Bellow, born of Russian immigrant parents in Canada, was raised in Chicago in a multicultural (English, French, and Jewish) household. See Wright, *Conversations with Richard Wright*, ed. Kenneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre, 46. Subsequent references will parenthetically appear in the text as *Conversations*.

3. Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” rpt. in *Richard Wright Reader*, ed. Ellen Wright and Michel Fabre, 45. The essay was originally published in *New Challenge* 2 (Fall 1935): 53–65. Further references to the essay are to *Richard Wright Reader* and are given in the text as “Blueprint.”

4. In ranking modern novelists writing in English—compared with the three Britons, Meredith, Hardy, and the early H. G. Wells—Allen Tate wrote in 1948: “I am convinced that among American novelists who have had large publics since the last war, only Dreiser, Faulkner, and Hemingway are of major importance” (86).

5. In response to a question of the influence of American novelists on French novelists, Wright said, “Sartre and Camus show that. French writers realized that action was lacking in their novels, at least in the raw, rapid, sure form that characterizes the good American writers (Hemingway, Caldwell, Lewis, and others). We should make clear that this only concerns the focus of some chapters in which the fiction is presented in vivid terms, without apparent style, to lay out a very intense impression. Now, in philosophical and conceptual matters, the influence is null” (*Conversations* 137).

6. Because Sister Carrie is not a portrait of a suffering woman, Wright must have meant *Jennie Gerhardt*, a story of an enduring woman who fights against the prejudices of class and gender.

7. In a *New York Post* interview in 1938, Wright stated: “I wanted to show exactly
what Negro life in the South means today. . . . I think the importance of any writing lies in how much felt life is in it.” The interviewer stated: “From reading Mencken in Memphis, Richard Wright branched out in Chicago to Henry James and Dostoievsky, to Hemingway, Malraux, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson and Dreiser, writers of ‘the more or less naturalistic school,’ although he lays no claims to being, or even wanting to be, a ‘naturalistic’ writer” (Conversations 4).

8. Stephen Crane, Great Short Works of Stephen Crane, 183. Textual references to Jennie Gerhardt are to Jennie Gerhardt, 1911, ed. James L. W. West III (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), and are subsequently given in parentheses.

9. Page references to Wright’s “Big Boy Leaves Home” are to Uncle Tom’s Children (1965).


12. Page references to “Nigger Jeff” are to Free and Other Stories and are parenthetically given in the text as Free.


14. Although Brooks recognized in Twain a genius and a “tortured conscience,” he thought that Twain’s dedication to humor, “[the] spirit of the artist in him,” diluted his philosophy of humankind. See Van Wyck Brooks, “From The Ordeal of Mark Twain,” 295–300.

15. In a letter of July 10, 1945, to Yvette Eastman, one of Dreiser’s young mistresses who had a literary ambition, Dreiser wrote:

Yvette Dear:

Such a poetic, Lovely letter from you this morning July 10th. You are off on a hill somewhere—up near Brewster, and you fairly sing of the heavens and the earth which considering all you have to do and your unchanging sense of duty always impresses me. I marvel that you dont [sic] at least verbally rebel against the conditions that have almost always made you earn your own way. So often I feel that it might be a relief to you if you were to write an honest forth right book like Black Boy and in it have your say concerning all the things you have had to endure and so what you think of life. It would be colorful and more dramatic and I feel it would sell, yet not only the data but because of the beauty of your prose. Why not.

See Yvette Eastman, Dearest Wilding: A Memoir with Love Letters from Theodore Dreiser, 211.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2:
The Cross-Cultural Vision of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man

1. In his essay “Remembering Richard Wright,” included in Going to the Territory, Ellison expresses his indebtedness to the encouragement and advice Wright offered the young Ellison. Ellison, however, is somewhat critical of Native Son: “I feel that Native Son
was one of the major literary events in the history of American literature. And I can say this even though at this point I have certain reservations concerning its view of reality” (Going 210–11). But, among Wright’s works, Ellison was most impressed by 12 Million Black Voices, which he viewed Wright’s “most lyrical work.” While Ellison thought that this compelling work of literature “could move [Wright’s] white readers to tears,” he also realized that Wright forged “such hard, mechanical images and actions that no white reading them could afford the luxury of tears” (Going 211).

2. Wright similarly refers to the Irish tradition in 12 Million Black Voices: “We lose ourselves in violent forms of dances in our ballrooms. The faces of the white world, looking on in wonder and curiosity, declare: ‘Only the negro can play!’ But they are wrong. They misread us. We are able to play in this fashion because we have been excluded, left behind; we play in this manner because all excluded folk play. The English say of the Irish, just as America says of us, that only the Irish can play, that they laugh through their tears. But every powerful nation says this of the folk whom it oppresses in justification of that oppression” (128).

3. For a study of Malraux’s influence on Ellison, see Savery.

4. Conversations with Richard Wright also is witness to Ellison’s alliance with modern European literatures and traditions. In an interview for American Weekend, published in Paris on 24 January 1959, Wright said: “Negro literature . . . is a good barometer of Negro reaction. As fields open up to Negroes, it will be reflected in Negro literature. There is a large group of Negro writers in Europe—Demby and Ellison in Rome, for instance. All of them are broadening their experiences in a European context” (Conversations 185).

5. Kun Jong Lee demonstrates that while Ellison appropriates Emerson’s condescending attitude toward the black race, he redirects this negative aspect of Emersonian self-reliance. Ellison, Lee argues, “both accepts and rejects Emersonianism” (342).

6. Robert Butler reads as a trope the veteran in Invisible Man, whose words admonish the protagonist to “learn to look beneath the surface” (Invisible Man 153) and subvert the materialistic values of the Horatio Alger myth (“City as Psychological Frontier” 127).

7. For recent discussions of Zen philosophy and aesthetics, see Hakutani, “Emerson” and “Ezra Pound.”


9. Most modern works on Zen stress the importance of genderlessness in their discussions of Zen. See, for example, Kurebayashi, 142–49.

10. The Zen master’s pronouncement “never stop” recalls Whitman’s last passage in “Song of Myself”: “Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another” (68), or the last lines in “Passage to India”: “O my brave soul! / O farther farther sail! / O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God? / O farther, farther, farther sail!” (294). Whitman’s final statement in “Song of Myself”—“If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles” (68)—echoes the Zen master’s: “It’s just underneath your standpoint.”

11. In the chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” in Moby-Dick, Melville writes: “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless all-color of atheism from which we shrink?” (169).
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3:
No Name in the Street: James Baldwin's Exploration of American Urban Culture

1. Baldwin writes: “If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world” (Fire 141).

2. In his last volume of essays Baldwin makes a similar assertion about African Americans’ somber realization of themselves: “This is why blacks can be heard to say, I ain’t got to be nothing but stay black, and die! which is, after all, a far more affirmative apprehension than I’m free, white, and twenty-one” (Devil 115).


4. In 1961 Baldwin wrote in his essay “In Search of a Majority”: “Whether I like it or not, or whether you like it or not, we are bound together forever. We are part of each other. What is happening to every Negro in the country at any time is also happening to you. There is no way around this. I am suggesting that these walls—these artificial walls—which have been up so long to protect us from something we fear, must come down” (Nobody 114). In 1963 he wrote in “My Dungeon Shook”: “Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. . . . But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it” (Fire 20–21).

5. Baldwin argues that although Wright’s authorial voice records the black anger as no black writer before him has ever done, it is also, unhappily, the overwhelming limitation of Native Son. What is sacrificed, according to Baldwin, is a necessary dimension to the novel: “the relationship that Negroes bear to one another, that depth of involvement and unspoken recognition of shared experience which creates a way of life” (Notes 27).

6. Benjamin DeMott regards Tony Maynard as an undeveloped character despite much space given for that purpose, but one might argue that No Name in the Street is not a collection of biographical portraits like Dreiser’s Twelve Men and A Gallery of Women, but rather an autobiographical narrative centering on its protagonist Baldwin. See DeMott, 158. The same argument applies to Baldwin’s characterization of the black postal worker described earlier. Cf. Gitlin, 469–70.

7. Moller observes that Baldwin’s various episodes are fragmentary and that his style in No Name in the Street is pretentiously casual (129).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4:
If Beale Street Could Talk: Baldwin’s Search for Love and Identity

1. I agree with Kichung Kim, who advances the theory that the difference between
Wright and Baldwin arises from the two different concepts of human beings. Kim argues that the weakness Baldwin sees in Wright and other protest writers “is not so much that they had failed to give a faithful account of the actual conditions of man but rather that they had failed to be steadfast in their devotion . . . to what man might and ought to be. Such a man . . . will not only survive oppression but will be strengthened by it.” See Kim, “Wright, the Protest Novel, and Baldwin’s Faith.”

2. See Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, 25. Tish in *If Beale Street Could Talk* often wonders if their expecting baby has inherited Fonny’s narrow, slanted eyes like those of Chinese people.

3. Saunders Redding observed that Wright, who paid homage to Africa, failed to find home in Africa. See Redding, “Reflections on Richard Wright,” 204. Like Wright, John A. Williams, who hailed from Mississippi, has said, “I have been to Africa and know that it is not my home. America is.” See Williams, *This Is My Country Too*, 169.

4. I agree with Benjamin DeMott, who regards Tony Maynard as an undeveloped and unimpressive character, but the weakness of Baldwin’s characterization results from his use of a sterile man in the context of creation and rebirth (DeMott 158).

5. See Baldwin’s interview by Kalamu ya Salaam, “James Baldwin: Looking towards the Eighties” (Salaam 40).

6. Sandra A. O’Neile observes in her essay, “Fathers, Gods, and Religion: Perceptions of Christianity and Ethnic Faith in James Baldwin,” that “more than the heritage of any other Black American writer, Baldwin’s works illustrate the schizophrenia of the Black American experience with Christianity.” Black people, she argues, needed a distinction “between Christianity as they knew it to be and Christianity as it was practiced in the white world” (O’Neile 125–43).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5:

*Jazz and Toni Morrison’s Urban Imagination of Desire and Subjectivity*

1. Morrison’s village within the city is similar to Richard Wright’s black church in the city. While Wright dismissed Christianity as useless for African Americans’ freedom and subjectivity, he valued the black church in the city because it enhanced their community life. In *12 Million Black Voices*, he observes: “Despite our new worldliness, despite our rhythms, our colorful speech, and our songs, we keep our churches alive. . . . Our churches are centers of social and community life, for we have virtually no other mode of communication and we are usually forbidden to worship God in the temples of the Bosses of the Buildings. The church is the door through which we first walked into Western civilization” (130–31).

2. Morrison defines Harlem as “a Black city” which “held this village quality for Black people—although on a grand scale and necessarily parochial . . . but the relationships were clannish because there was joy and protection in the clan” (“City Limits” 38).

3. What impressed Wright when he arrived in Chicago from the Deep South was the relative absence of discrimination. “It was strange,” he wrote in *American Hunger*, “to pause before a crowded newsstand and buy a newspaper without having to wait until a white man was served” (1–2). Although he was allowed to sit beside white men and women on a streetcar, as are Jake Jackson and his companions in *Lawd Today*, he began to
feel "a different sort of tension than I had known before. I knew that this machine-city was governed by strange laws" (2). American Hunger also describes an episode which suggests that some white citizens were not so much obsessed with the problems of race as were Southerners and that a black man was often treated by white citizens as an equal.

4. Similarly, Dreiser in Jennie Gerhardt, as pointed out earlier, describes the city as a site of freedom in thought and action. Although Lester is characterized as an animalistic man, he is also seen as an erudite man who is keenly aware of his religious, cultural, and social environment.

5. Wright's “primal outlook upon life” derives from Edmund Husserl's Ideas, from which Wright quotes a passage. Husserl is suggesting the preeminence of the physical world over the scientific vision of that world and a reliance on intuition rather than on history in the search for truth. Morrison's concept of life, which is also based on awe of nature as is Husserl's and Wright's, is closely allied with her concept of society, which, much like Wright's African primal outlook, emphasizes kinship and love in the family.

6. Joe Trace's concern over the plight of African American children to be born in racist society recalls Sethe's willingness to kill their children in Beloved so as to spare them the pain and suffering of slavery, and of Roxy's desire to switch her own infant with a white one in the cradle in Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson.

7. While James is known for generating desire impressionistically, Dreiser depicts desire as if he were a romantic transcendentalist. In portraying Hurstwood's desire, Dreiser draws on the mood of spring: “Meanwhile, he accepted his present situation with Carrie, getting what joy out of it he could. Out came the sun by noon, and poured a golden flood through their open windows. Sparrows were twittering. There were laughter and song in the air. Hurstwood could not keep his eyes from Carrie. She seemed the one ray of sunshine in all his trouble. Oh, if she would only love him wholly—only throw her arms around him . . .” (Sister Carrie 316).

8. In his “Vorticism” essay Pound considered an image not as a decorative emblem or symbol but as a seed capable of germinating and developing into another organism.

9. In an interesting analysis of Morrison's use of figurative language in Jazz, Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua notes: “Alice unsuccessfully attempts to navigate her niece away from people represented by Violet and Joe Trace, the synecdochal representations of ‘[the] embarrassing kind' (Jazz 79). More specifically, to Alice, Joe and Violet become a metonymy for impending danger and their actions synecdochal proof” (Chadwick-Joshua 175).

10. Chadwick-Joshua remarks that Morrison introduces Felice synecdochically and “elects to allow the city to reveal her piece-meal—a slowly-evolving synecdoche. Interestingly, the girl is referred to by name as friend and companion to Alice's niece, Dorcas, even on the night Joe shoots Dorcas. But the real connection and the substantive characterization of Felice, or the girl with the Okeh record, evidences itself only the final third of the novel” (179).

11. Elizabeth M. Cannon observes that the significance of soloists in jazz is indicative of individualism. “Jazz,” Cannon notes, “is also the perfect vehicle for suggesting that the object of desire is subjectivity: Jazz wouldn’t be jazz without the improvisation of soloists” (237).

12. In an interpretation of Morrison's paradoxical expression, Chadwick-Joshua notes that jazz's voice “possesses a womanist voice that is itself a womanist voice of paradox—a
voice that entices and seduces to one’s regret yet a voice that nurtures and omnisciently know what an individual will need and set about appropriate preparations” (179).

13. In search of his mother, Joe Trace confronts what he had imagined to be the woman named “Wild,” a signifier of nature, and utters: “Give me a sign, then. You don’t have to say nothing. Let me see your hand. Just stick it out someplace and I’ll go; I promise. A sign. . . . You my mother?” The narrator observes by saying, “Yes. No. Both. Either. But not this nothing” (178). “The small children,” the narrator observes, “believed she was a witch, but they were wrong. This creature hadn’t the intelligence to be a witch. She was powerless, invisible, wastefully draft. Everywhere and nowhere” (179). Morrison’s use of the word nothing as a trope for one’s inability to see truth is similar to Melville’s metaphysics in “The Whiteness of the Whale” in Moby-Dick: Melville questions whether whiteness, the absence of color, signifies “the heartless voids” of the universe and a state of nothingness (169). If the ubiquity of nothingness is a representation of the absence of God, this concept has some affinity with the Zen enlightenment, the state of nothingness, which enables a Zen follower to attain self-reliance by annihilating Buddha.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6: Wright’s The Outsider and French Existentialism

1. See Charles I. Glicksberg, “Existentialism in The Outsider” and “The God of Fiction.” Michel Fabre specifically indicates that Wright’s composition of The Outsider was influenced by Camus’s The Stranger. See Fabre, “Richard Wright, French Existentialism, and The Outsider,” 191.
6. See, for instance, Robert de Luppe, Albert Camus 46–47.
7. The most precise analysis of Camus’s concept of time is presented in Ignace Feuerlicht, “Camus’s L’Étranger Reconsidered.”

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7: Pagan Spain: Wright’s Discourse on Religion and Culture

1. Paul Gilroy, in The Black Atlantic, has defended Wright’s later works, such as Black Power, Pagan Spain, and The Color Curtain, against “those tendencies in African-American literary criticism which argue that the work he produced while living in Europe was worthless when compared to his supposedly authentic earlier writings” (x).


6. The supreme, pantheistic divinity in Shintoism, the Japanese state religion, is the goddess Ama-Terusu Ohmi Kami, literally translated as “Heaven-Shining Great God.”


8. Instead of emphasizing sexuality as the cause of repression, Carl Jung theorized that the primal, universal, collective unconsciousness has a sexual as well as nonsexual component. According to Jungian psychology, personality consists of the persona, which is consciously presented to the world, and the anima, which is unconsciously repressed. When Wright explored the Black Virgin at Montserrat, he seemed to be more impressed by the collective, racial unconsciousness akin to Jungianism than by the sexual repression in Freudianism. To his Spanish companion Wright said, “Pardo, don’t you see that conglomeration of erect stone penises? Open your eyes, man. You can’t miss. I’m not preaching the doctrines of Freud. Let the facts you see speak to you—” (Pagan Spain 66).

9. The paradox of bullfighting is also apparent in the expression of “Ole!” when the matador incites the bull. The expression means “For God’s sake,” the pagan religious phrases of the Moors, but the audience, as Wright points out, were not aware of the pagan origin of the expression. It is seemingly contradictory that the matador and the audience were invoking the name of God in keeping with Christian as well as pagan tradition. Wright makes a reference in the footnote to Américo Castro’s The Structure of Spanish History (Pagan Spain 90).

10. Big Boy, hiding in a kiln, watches Bobo being lynched and burned:

“LES GIT SOURVINEERS!”

... “Everybody git back!”
“Look! Hes gotta finger!”

... “He’s got one of his ears, see?”

... “HURRY UP N BURN THE NIGGER FO IT RAINS!”

....

Bobo was struggling, twisting; they were binding his arms and legs. ... The flames leaped tall as the trees. The scream came again. Big Boy trembled and looked. The mob was running down the slopes, leaving the fire clear. Then he saw a writhing white mass cradled in yellow flame, and heard screams, one on top of the other, each shriller and shorter than the last. The mob was quiet now, standing still, looking up the slopes at the writhing white mass gradually growing black, growing black in a cradle of yellow flame. (Uncle Tom’s Children 49)

11. Wright describes the scene where a black physician examined Chris’s body: “He rolled the corpse upon its back and carefully parted the thighs. ‘The genitalia are gone,’ the doctor intoned. Fishbelly saw a dark, coagulated blot in a gaping hole between the
thighs and, with defensive reflex, he lowered his hands nervously to his groin. 'I'd say that
the genitals were pulled out by a pair of pliers or some like instrument,' the doctor
inferred. 'Killing him wasn't enough. They had to mutilate im. You'd think that disgust
would've made them leave that part of the boy alone. . . . No! To get a chance to mutilate
im was part of why they killed im. And you can bet a lot of white women were watch-
ing eagerly when they did it. Perhaps they knew that that was the only opportunity they'd
ever get to see a Negro's genitals—’” (Long Dream 78).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8:
The African “Primal Outlook upon Life”: Wright and Morrison

1. Discussing Wright’s impressions of a colonial city like Accra, which looked sordid
and decaying, Jack B. Moore remarks: “True, the Old Slave Market in Christianborg is
crumbling, its walls rotting and columns broken into rubble . . . but that is made to seem
not a symbol of the old life’s death, but of the constant decay of matter in the city where
Ghana’s new life will soon be constructed and centered” (71).

2. Commenting on African American novelists’ use of a journey motif, Trudier
Harris observes: “Paule Marshall has consciously tried to reconnect African-American and
African traditions by exploring those in the Caribbean; her Praisesong for the Window
(1983) also incorporates a journey motif with a quest for ancestors through legends told
about them and ceremonies performed for them” (191).

3. Iyunolu Osagie, also intrigued by Beloved’s appearance and disappearance, argues
that “the stories about Beloved’s identity, her appearance, and her leave-taking are actually
left to the reader’s imagination.” Osagie further notes that the “multiple readings of
Beloved echo the elusive nature of psychoanalysis and its tendency to recover itself con-
stantly; this tendency makes psychoanalysis an uncanny representation of literature”
(435).

4. Dogen’s teaching is a refutation of the assumption that life and death are entirely
separate entities as are seasons (Kurebayashi 121–29).

5. Interviewed by L’Express in 1955 shortly after the publication of Black Power,
Wright responded to the question, “Why do you write?”: “The accident of race and color
has placed me on both sides: the Western World and its enemies. If my writing has any
aim, it is to try to reveal that which is human on both sides, to affirm the essential unity
of man on earth” (Conversations 163).

6. Baby Suggs’s celebration of love and kinship bears a resemblance to the opening
lines of Whitman’s “Song of Myself”:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. (25)

Later in the story, Morrison, in describing Baby Suggs’s self-creation, refers to “the roots of her
tongue” (141), with which Baby Suggs tries to fill “the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home” (140). Whitman’s lines quoted above are followed by these lines:

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same, (25)

7. Trudier Harris reads Sethe’s infanticide in light of the love theme: “If, on the other hand, we understand, accept, and perhaps even approve of the dynamics that allowed a slave mother to kill rather than have her children remanded to slavery, would not the dominant theme be love?” (159–60).

8. While Wright was emotionally attracted to tribal life, he was critical of its mysterious elements. Although he was convinced of the inevitable industrialization capitalism would bring about in Africa, he was extremely apprehensive of the exploitation of human power, a new form of slavery, that industrialism would introduce into Africa. Whether his argument is concerned with people or politics, his emphasis is placed on self-creation, the generation of confidence in Africans themselves individually and as a culture.

9. Sethe’s paradox is remindful of the action of Roxy, a slave mother in Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. What Roxy does in switching the babies is deemed morally just because her action comes from her heart, from a mother’s genuine love for her child.

10. Osagie’s observation seems to reflect Wright’s: “Freudian psychoanalysis,” Osagie argues, “has its foundation in the oedipus complex. African psychoanalysis has its roots in the social and cultural setting of its peoples—in their beliefs in concepts such as nature, the supernatural realm, reincarnation, and retribution” (424).

11. Wright also maintains that the Freudian approach does not apply to paganism, which characterizes Spanish culture. In discussing the symbolism of the Black Virgin, he tells his Spanish companion: “I’m not preaching the doctrine of Freud. Let the facts you see speak to you” (*Pagan Spain* 66). Later in the book Wright observes that “to have attempted a psychological approach in a Freudian sense would have implied a much more intimate acquaintance with the daily family lives of the people than I had—an access to case histories and clinical material even. Otherwise my facts would have been forever wide of the theories. In the end I resolved to accept the brute facts and let the theories go” (195).

**NOTES TO CHAPTER 9:**

The Poetics of Nature: Wright’s Haiku, Zen, and Lacan

1. According to Toru Kiuchi, this South African poet, identified as Sinclair Beiles in Michel Fabre’s *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (14), was “one of the Beat poets and . . . his and the Beat poets’ interest in Zen led Wright to the knowledge of haiku.” Kiuchi further notes: “Because the Beat Hotel was in the Latin Quarter and Wright lived very close to the hotel, Wright must have haunted the hotel bar. I assume that Wright took an interest in Zen, an Asian religious philosophy, which some of the Beat poets brought up as one of the important topics, and that Wright then must have known haiku through his conversations with Beiles” (Kiuchi 1).

2. In 1960 Wright selected, under the title *This Other World: Projections in the Haiku*
Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius, a biographical and critical study, Margaret Walker remarks: “He absolutely worshipped the art of poetry. He felt a close affinity to all modern poets and their poetry and read poetry with a passion—Shakespeare, Hart Crane, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, and Walt Whitman. . . . In the last years of his life, Wright discovered the Japanese form of poetry known as Haiku and became more than a little interested in what was not just a strange and foreign stanza but an exercise in conciseness—getting so much meaning or philosophy in so few words” (313–14).

11. *Hokku* is an older term for haiku. Basho and other haiku poets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries called haiku *hokku*.

12. Traditionally, the principle of instantaneity and spontaneity is as fundamental to the composition of haiku as the same principle is when applied to Zen-inspired painting and calligraphy. One must efface subjectivity: the longer it takes one to compose the work, the more likely it is for subjectivity to take over the composition.

13. The original of the haiku is in Henderson, 40. The translation is by Hakutani.

14. The original of the haiku is in Henderson, 18. The translation is quoted from Blyth, History of Haiku, 12, xxix.

15. For a definition of *sabi* and other terms in Eastern and Japanese aesthetics, see Hakutani, Richard Wright, 275–82.

16. The original of the haiku is in Henderson, 58. The translation is by Hakutani.

17. The original of the haiku is in Henderson, 104. The translation is by Hakutani.

18. The original of the haiku is in Henderson, 102. The translation is by Hakutani.
Ando, Zen and American Transcendentalism, and Hakutani, “Emerson, Whitman, and Zen Buddhism.”

2. For recent studies of the influences of Eastern poetics on Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, see, for example, Hakutani, “Ezra Pound,” and Tomlinson.

3. Whitman in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” endowing a young boy with a poetic inspiration, celebrates the birth of a poet:

Demon or bird! (said the boy’s soul,)  
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?  
For I, that was a child, my tongue’s use sleeping, now I have heard you,  
Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,  
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,  
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.  
(183)

4. Wright’s lyricism is evident in the early section of Black Boy in which a young African American seeks a harmony between nature and society.

5. As discussed earlier, after his journey into Africa to write Black Power, Wright traveled to Spain to write Pagan Spain. Even compared with some parts of Africa, and most of Asia, Spain to him lagged behind in its progress toward modernism. “The African,” Wright notes in Pagan Spain, “though thrashing about in a void, was free to create a future, but the pagan traditions of Spain had sustained no such mortal wound” (193). Such a critical view of Spain notwithstanding, Wright was nevertheless sympathetic toward the energetic maternal instinct of the Spanish woman without which Spanish culture would not have survived after World War II. Wright discovered, as noted earlier, a strong affinity between the indigenous matriarchalism in the Ashanti and the stalwart womanhood in Spain.

6. In his review of The Color Purple, Mel Watkins commented: “While Netti[e]’s letters broaden and reinforce the theme of female oppression by describing customs of the Olinka tribe that parallel some found in the American South, they are often mere monologues on African history. Appearing, as they do, after Celie’s intensely subjective voice has been established, they seem lackluster and intrusive” (7).

7. Wright defines the African primal view of life in terms of the cultural differences between a person of African heritage and that of a European immigrant: “There is no reason why an African or a person of African descent—in America, England, or France—should abandon his primal outlook upon life if he finds that no other way of life is available, or if he is intimidated in his attempt to grasp the new way. . . . There is nothing mystical or biological about it. When one realizes that one is dealing with two distinct and separate worlds of psychological being, two conceptions of time even, the problem becomes clear; it is a clash between two systems of culture” (Black Power 266).

8. During the eighteenth century a satirical form of haiku called senryu was developed by Karai Senryu (1718–90) as a kind of “mock haiku” with humor, moralizing nuances, and a philosophical tone, expressing “the incongruity of things” more than their oneness, dealing more often with distortions and failures, not just with the harmonious beauty of nature.
9. Wright writes about the Ashanti’s worldview: “The pre-Christian African was impressed with the littleness of himself and he walked the earth warily, lest he disturb the presence of invisible gods. When he wanted to disrupt the terrible majesty of the ocean in order to fish, he first made sacrifices to its crashing and rolling waves; he dared not cut down a tree without first propitiating its spirit so that it would not haunt him; he loved his fragile life and he was convinced that the tree loved its life also” (Black Power 261–62).

10. In his preface to The Ambassadors, James accounts for the function of a minor character like Maria Gostrey in his rendition of a major character, Lambert Strether: “The ‘ficelle’ character of the subordinate party is as artfully dissimulated, throughout, as may be, and to that extent that, with the seams or joints of Maria Gostrey’s ostensible connectedness taken particular care of, duly smoothed over, that is, and anxiously kept from showing as ‘pieced on’; this figure doubtless achieves, after a fashion, something of the dignity of a prime idea” (13).

11. Shug plays the role of a functional character, Tucker maintains, so that Celie is able to “write herself” . . . to counter the victim-figures like her mother, and the dominant male figures of Albert and her father” (85).

### Notes to Chapter 11:

#### Cross-Cultural Poetics: Sonia Sanchez’s Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums

1. The original in Japanese reads “Yama-dori-no / o / wo / fumu / haru no / iri-hi / kana.” The English translation is by Hakutani.

2. The original and the translation are quoted from Blyth, History of Haiku 2: 56. A literal translation of Moritake’s first two lines would be, “A fallen flower appears to come back to its branch,” as noted in chapter 9 on Wright’s haiku.

3. For the influence of haiku on Pound’s imagism, see Hakutani, “Ezra Pound.”

4. The original is quoted from Henderson. The translation of this haiku is by Hakutani.

5. The translation of this haiku is by Hakutani.

6. See Haiku: This Other World by Richard Wright. The 817 haiku are numbered consecutively, as noted earlier: “In the Silent Forest” is number 316, and “A Thin Waterfall” 569.

7. The word sabi in Japanese, a noun, derives from the verb sabiru, to rust, implying that what is described is aged. Buddha’s portrait hung in Zen temples, the old man with a thin body, is nearer to his soul just as the old tree with its skin and leaves fallen is nearer to the very origin and essence of nature. For a further discussion of Buddha’s portrait, see Loehr, 216.

8. As discussed earlier, while Freud defines death as the opposite of life, meaning that death reduces all animate things to the inanimate, Lacan defines death as “human experience, human interchanges, intersubjectivity,” suggesting that death is part of life (Seminar II 80). To Lacan, the death instinct is not “an admission of impotence, it isn’t a coming to a halt before an irreducible, an ineffable last thing, it is a concept” (Seminar II 70).

9. In reference to the works of Zeami, the author of many of the extant nob plays, Arthur Waley, perhaps one of the best-known scholars of Eastern literature, expounds on this difficult term:
It is applied to the natural graces of a boy’s movements, to the gentle restraint of a nobleman’s speech and bearing. “When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to the ear,” that is the yugen of music. The symbol of yugen is “a white bird with a flower in its beak.” “To watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill, to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return, to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid [sic] by far-off islands, to ponder on the journey of wild-geese seen and lost among the clouds”—such are the gates to yugen. (Waley 21–22)

10. This stanza, filled with rather superficial racial and cultural labels, is reminiscent of the least inspiring stanza in Whitman’s “Song of Myself”:

Magnifying and applying come I,
Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,
Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved,
With Odin and the heinous-faced Mexitli and every idol and image, (58)

NOTES TO CHAPTER 12:
James Emanuel’s Jazz Haiku and African American Individualism

1. See “Author’s Preface” in Jazz from the Haiku King (iv). Page references to Emanuel’s poems discussed in this chapter are to this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically.

2. See Donald Keene’s detailed historical account of haikai poetry, from which haiku evolved (337–55).


4. The first collection of renga—Chikuba Kyogin Shu (Comic Song Collection, 1499)—includes over two hundred tsukeku (adding verses) linked with the first verses of another poet. As the title of the collection suggests, the salient characteristic of renga was a display of ingenuity and coarse humor. This volume also collected twenty hokku (starting verses). Because hokku, an earlier term for haiku, was considered the most important verse of a renga, it was usually composed by the senior poet attending a renga session. On the origin and development of renga and haiku, see Keene, 11–55.

5. Craig Werner has provided an incisive account of the jazz impulse: “Jazz, observed Louis Armstrong, is music that’s never played the same way once. The world changes, the music changes. Jazz imagines the transitions, distills the deepest meanings of the moment we’re in, how it developed from the ones that came before, how it opens up into the multiple possibilities of the ones to come” (Change 132).

6. In “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim” (219), an elegy for dead soldiers, Whitman celebrates their death and alludes to their natural and divine heritage. Even though he finds them physically dead, he senses that their bodies, united with the earth, are spiritually alive.
7. Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (1785) has a passage revealing his basic attitude toward nature and humanity: “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue” (164–65).

8. On the origin and development of this verse form, see Keene, 109–15.

9. Senryu, as noted earlier, is a humorous haiku with moralizing nuances and a philosophical tone that expresses the incongruity of things rather than their oneness. Because senryu tend to appeal more to one’s sense of the logical than to intuition, this jazz haiku can be read as a senryu.

10. The original of “Autumn Is Deepening” is quoted from Imoto, Basho: Sono Jinsei to Geijitsu [Basho: His Life and Art] (231). The translation is by Hakutani.

11. Emanuel’s humorous imagination, in which he is dreaming of digging the earth deeper to reach the other side of the world, is reminiscent of Mark Twain’s. In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer talks about his outrageous, farfetched imagination, in which Jim, imprisoned in the dungeon of the Castle Deep and given a couple of case-knives, would be able to dig himself out through the earth for thirty-seven years and come out in China. Despite Huck’s rebuke of Tom for entertaining such an idea, Twain’s conjuring up visions of Jim’s freedom from slavery to a slaveless society is akin to Emanuel’s wish for jazz to cross cultural borders in disseminating the African American suffering and joy. See Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 191–92.
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