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.