Cross-Cultural Visions in African American Modernism

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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. Keneth 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 
knows 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 somewhere and I’ll go; I prom-
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 meta-
physics 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.


3. See Saunders Redding, Baltimore Afro-American, 19 May 1953; Lloyd Brown, 
“Outside and Low.”


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.”

8. See Redding’s review in Baltimore Afro-American, in Reilly, Reception 225–27; and 
Melvin Altschuler, “An Important, but Exasperating Book,” in Washington Post, in Reilly, 
Reception 203–4.

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).


3. See Wright, “Interview with Richard Wright,” L’Express, in Conversations with 
Richard Wright, 203.
6. The supreme, pantheistic divinity in Shintoism, the Japanese state religion, is the goddess Ama-Terasu 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!”
    . . .

    Big Boy 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 actual-
ly 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 myster-
rious 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 psy-
chological approach in a Freudian sense would have implied a much more intimate acquain-
tance 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 fur-
ther 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 inter-
est 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 con-
versations with Beiles” (Kiuchi 1).

2. In 1960 Wright selected, under the title This Other World: Projections in the Haiku
Manner, 817 of the 4,000 haiku he had written in the last eighteen months of his life. This collection was published as *Haiku: This Other World*, ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener, in 1998, and was reprinted in 2000. In this edition each of the haiku is numbered consecutively 1 through 817. The haiku quoted in the chapter are from this edition and identified by number.

3. To Melville, if you unscrew your navel, your backside falls off. See the scene of the doubloon in *Moby-Dick* at the end of chapter 99 (363): Melville’s navel symbolizes the limit of intersubjectivity. Beyond the navel, the backside of the navel, lies the absolute real—unknown and unconscious to the subject.

4. For a further discussion of Lacan as the master of psychoanalysis, see Samuels and Borch-Jacobsen.

5. Barthes found an empty center in signs of traditional Japanese culture, such as its food, its landscapes, and its quintessential poetic form, haiku (3–37).

6. The original and the translation are quoted from Blyth, *History of Haiku*, 2; 56.

7. A literal translation of the first two lines, “Rakka eda ni / Kaeru to mireba,” reads, “A fallen flower appears to come back to its branch.”

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

9. See the cover of *Haiku: This Other World*.

10. In *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* 2, 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.

**NOTES TO CHAPTER 10:**

Private Voice and Buddhist Enlightenment in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*

1. For comparative studies of American transcendentalism and Zen, see, for example,

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 hideous-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.