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Studies in Afro-American Literature: An Annual Annotated Bibliography, 1984

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INTERVIEWS


17. Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Arnold Rampersad correctly describes Baker's aim as "nothing less than to lead us to rethink and eventually to rewrite American literary history mainly by recognizing certain factors as crucial in the evolution of culture and cultural discourse in America. These factors include the largely illusory or fictitious nature of much of what is asserted as factual in a cultural sense; the economic basis of society, and the indispensable role of economics in black self-liberation; the need to recognize as a deeply serious art the vernacular or folk forms of expressive culture; and the supremacy of the blues, properly and expansively defined, among the forms that express the historic consciousness of Afro-Americans. The blues is central to the entire argument."


21. Cooke, Michael G. *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. Attempts "to identify and illuminate the essential structure of Afro-American literature" of the twentieth century—e.g., works by Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Ishmael Reed, Alice Walker, Jean Toomer, Robert Hayden, James Weldon Johnson, Michael Harper, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Nella Larsen, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Eldridge Cleaver. The study focuses "on the intrinsic development of this literature out of the secret matrix of signifying and the blues into successive conditions of (1) self-veiling, (2) solitude, (3) kinship, and (4) intimacy. Each of these..."
conditions manifests an advance, a lessening of limitation in relation to its antecedent, with intimacy achieving an exemplary orientation of lucidity, courage, and aptitude in Afro-American vision.”


**STUDIES IN FICTION**


40. Fishman, Charles. "Naming Names: Three Recent Novels by Women Writers." *Names* 32.1 (1984): 33-44. Takes up the question of names and their function in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Margaret Atwood's *Life Before Man*, and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*. Fishman discusses these authors' choices of place and character names on four planes: 1) levels and boundaries, 2) status, 3) misnaming and barriers, and 4) power: real and imaginary.

41. Harris, Trudier. *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. Harris reviews "the tradition of actual ritualistic lynchings," discusses "the literature of emasculation and the literature of ritualistic lynchings and burnings (in fiction by Wright and Wideman), and examines Morrison's *Tar Baby* and David Bradley's ritualistic lynchings and burnings."

43. Jackson, Jacquelyn Logan. "The Black Novelist and the Expatriate Experience: Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Chester Himes." DAI 45 (1984): 183A. University of Kentucky. Concludes that exile was positive for the three writers: not only did they survive as artists; they "transcended the constricting myths and realities of America and pursued new directions in their art."


54. White, Vernessa C. *Afro-American and East German Fiction: A Comparative Study of Alienation, Identity and the Development of Self*. New York: Peter Lang, 1983. Explores the themes of the subtitle in works by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Guenter De Bruyn, and Hermann Kant. Concludes that these authors "argue that it is the individual's inability to accept or relate to himself that which damages his relationships with others and thus impedes social progress."


**STUDIES IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

“Because of the close relation of the personal and the group experience in black autobiography, changes in the authors’ perspectives of the ‘I’ are vitally linked to changes in the social status of the group, that is to the progress being made toward true equality of black people in the USA. Thus the function of the ‘I’ in the slave narrative is very different from that in contemporary black autobiography.”

Olney, James. “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and As Literature.” *Callaloo* 7.1 (1984): 46-73. Makes comments “about autobiography and its special nature as a memorial, creative act; then outlining some of the common themes and nearly invariable conventions of slave narratives; and finally attempting to determine the place of the slave narrative 1) in the spectrum of autobiographical writing, 2) in the history of American literature, and 3) in the making of an Afro-American literary tradition.”


**STUDIES IN INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS**

*Baldwin, James*


62. Powers, Lyall H. "Henry James and James Baldwin: The Complex Figure." *Modern Fiction Studies* 30.4 (1984): 651-657. Drawing on Baldwin's professed enthusiasm for James, Powers finds the two authors sharing a sensibility. "At bottom, the aims of these two writers are much the same: to examine the problem of learning to live in a 'civilized' society whose manner, conventions, prejudices often threaten individual integrity."

See also 21,38,39,42,43,122,141.

*Bambara, Toni Cade*

63. Hargrove, Nancy D. "Youth in Toni Cade Bambara’s *Gorilla, My Love.*" *Women Writers of the Contemporary South*. Ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984. 215-232. We see the joys and problems of Bambara’s young characters. "Told from the viewpoint of young black girls, they [the short stories] capture how it feels as a child to undergo the various experiences of loneliness, disillusionment, and close relationships with others."

See also 23, 32.

*Baraka, Amiri*

64. Andrews, W. D. E. "The Marxist Theater of Amiri Baraka." *Comparative Drama* 18.2 (1984): 137-161. Sees Baraka’s career since the mid-seventies "culminating in international socialism." Focuses on *The Motion of History* and *S-1* and concludes that the characters might be at the mercy of a relentless author.

65. Islam, Syed Manzoorul. "The Ritual Plays of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)." *Indian Journal of American Studies* 14.1 (1984): 43-55. In Baraka’s plays cruelty has a two-fold function: "to reduce language even further into mere words, thus showing their essential limitations; and to focus on the carefully stylized physical postures and emotional expressions as more adequate forms of stage audience communication." Cruelty in Baraka’s plays becomes an autonomous ritual form, but it is also related to the progressive evolution of the plays’ consciousness by becoming the medium of expression of this consciousness. It there assumes a ritualistic and dramatic role as well as performs on a semantic level. . . . This essay proposes to treat this important function of cruelty-ritual for a proper understanding of Baraka’s overall ritual pattern."

extensive biographical and critical study of Baraka, including an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

See 22.

**Brooks, Gwendolyn**


68. Lattin, Patricia and Vernon E. Lattin. "Dual Vision in Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha.*" *Critique* 25.4 (1984): 180-188. Stepping into what they perceive as a critical void, the Lattins discuss *Maud Martha* as a "comedy of the commonplace" that also allows us to see "the effects of racism, the occasional absurdity of human behavior, and the quest of one individual for beauty."


70. Schuchat, Marjorie Jane Smock. "Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks: A Janus Poet." *DAI* 43 (1983): 2994A. Texas Woman’s University. Brooks looks back into the Afro-American past and looks forward to a projected future when there is freedom. In her early poems, Christianity is "a major motif," but "a political motif" dominates her poetry since the late 1960s.

See also 4, 23, 24, 50.

**Bullins, Ed**


**Butler, Octavia**


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*Caleb, J. Rufus*


*Chesnutt, Charles Waddell*

76. Burnette, R. V. "Charles Waddell Chesnutt: The Published Fiction." *DAI* 45 (1984): 519A. Rutgers University. The reception and literary reputation of Chesnutt from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. Also an examination of "the sociology that informs and shapes" his fiction.


79. Hedges, James S. "The Mole on the Neck: Two Instances of a Folk Belief in Fiction." *North Carolina Folklore* 31.1 (1983): 43-45. Charles W. Chesnutt's thematic use of the following folk belief in *The Marrow of Tradition*: "If you have a mole on your neck, you will be hanged."

See also 21
Childress, Alice


Christian, Marcus B.


Cullen, Countee

82. Shucard, Alan R. *Countee Cullen.* Boston: Twayne, 1984. An examination of Cullen as writer in terms of his relationship to the Harlem Renaissance; of the themes, subject matter and quality of his poetry; and of his fiction and drama. Also devotes a chapter to the critical reception of Cullen.

Delany, Samuel

83. Barr, Marleen. "The Metalinguistic Racial Grammar of Bellona: Ethnicity, Language and Meaning in Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren.*" *Patterns of the Fantastic.* Ed. Donald M. Hassler, 1983. 57-62. Barr attempts to offer “a brief theoretical explanation of the function of metalinguistics in both *Dhalgren* and the science fiction genre. This introduction is followed by a practical discussion of how Delany’s idiosyncratic (or metalinguistic) style, his definitions of which are uniquely pertinent to the novel’s text, illustrates the reality of racism in contemporary America.”

84. Bray, Mary Kay. "Rites of Reversal: Double Consciousness in Delany’s *Dhalgren.*" *Black American Literature Forum* 18.2 (1984): 57-61. Bray finds in *Dahlgren* a double vision (based partly, but not entirely, on Delany’s race consciousness) that provides a complete, non-judgmental view of America. "What the reader does with that experience is up to him or her."


88. Massè, Michelle. "'All you have to do is know what you want': Individual Expectations in *Triton*." *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Eds. George E. Slusser et al. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983. 49-64. Argues that Delany's *Triton* and LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* comment to each other.

89. Nilon, Charles. "The Science Fiction of Samuel R. Delany and the Limits of Technology." *Black American Literature Forum* 18.2 (1984): 62-68. Emphasizes the human side of Delany's work. "Delany's novels show that he believes that technology is always both constructive and destructive—and that technology is limited in what it can do to make man more human."

90. Weedman, Jane. "Art and the Artist's Role in Delany's Works." *Voices for the Future: Volume Three*. Eds. Thomas D. Clarson and Thomas L. Wymer. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984. 151-185. "In Delany's early works are found the kernals of the subject which, as he matures, becomes central to his themes and to his style: the role of the artist in society and the process of that art. Art is not confined to literature in his works; he includes music, theater and painting as well as poetry and prose. Delany, by using these art forms, is able to discuss both the process of art and the qualities and purposes of artists in a culture." For Delany the role of the artist "is to observe, record or transmit and question paradigms in a society." But it is not the responsibility of the artist to solve or resolve problems; rather the artist is "only to provide order so that others may observe their situation and take their own actions."

See also 6, 38.
Dodson, Owen

91. Hatch, James V. "All Our Farewells Cry to Thee." *Black American Literature Forum* 18.1 (1984): 3-4. A tribute to Owen Dodson in the form of a Memory of an evening with him. "Owen was in no wise a perfect man; he could be jealous, self-pitying and even mean. Yet he was one of nature's noblemen."

92. __. "Introduction to 'Freedom, the Banner'." *Callaloo* 7.2 (1984): 57-58. Describes the circumstances which occasioned the play and the 1943 production of the play. A complete text of the play follows Hatch's introduction.

Dove, Rita


Dunbar, Paul Laurence


See also 17.

Dunbar-Nelson, Alice.


Ellison, Ralph

65) attempts "to move beyond . . . ethnic boundaries and seek an identity in basic human terms."


102. Fabre, Michel. "'Looking at the naked blonde—closely' (or Scrutinizing Ellison's Writing)." Delta. No. 18 (April 1984): 119-131. Studies "textual features" of Invisible Man in terms of three devices: (1) the rhetorical patterning used to balance a syntax of ambivalent meanings; (2) the rich, though often faint, intertextual hints which invite a literary, rather than a referential, decoding of the text; and (3) the use of lexical connotations and semantic echoes to reactivate fossilized cliches and liberate meaning."


104. Gretlund, Jan Nordby. "Protest and Affirmation in Ralph Ellison's 'And Hickman Arrives.'" Delta. No. 18 (April 1984): 15-23. The theme of the excerpt from Ellison's forthcoming novel is "the futility of racism and
segregation.” “The story is,” says Gretlund, “a protest against blacks being pushed aside as a quaint group that could have nothing of value to contribute to the common good.”

105. Romanent, Jerome de. “Musical Elements in *Invisible Man* with Special References to the Blues.” *Delta*. No. 18 (April 1984): 105-118. Mentions the numerous musical allusions (from the period of slavery to the mid-twentieth century), but focuses on the blues, from which the central theme of the novel derives.

106. Tewarie, Bhoendradatt. “Southern Elements in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.” *Journal of General Education* 35.3 (1983): 189-200. Argues that the early episodic chapters of *Invisible Man* are representative of the Southern black experience, and that this regional understanding provides greater insight into the later Northern chapters.


109. Whyte, Philippe. “*Invisible Man* as a Trickster Tale.” *Delta*. No. 18 (April 1984): 47-67. The “mechanisms of deceit, revenge, conquest and failure, which the trickster tale presents in the form of fable, find their fullest expressions” in the protagonist’s efforts “to achieve social success and shake off ‘old Southern backwardness’.”

See also 17, 21, 25, 141, 171.

*Fauset, Jessie*


See also 36.
Gaines, Ernest

111. Callahan, John. "Hearing is Believing: The Landscape of Voice in Ernest Gaine's Bloodline." Callaloo 7.1 (1984): 86-112. "For Gaines the spoken word and the oral tradition refer to a world of Afro-American kinship ties based as much on speaking and hearing as on blood. That is why he so often tells his stories from the perspective and in the voice of someone who participates in and makes the story happen as well as tells it."

112. Davis, Thadious M. "Headlands and Quarters: Louisiana in Catherine Carmier." Callaloo 7.2 (1984): 1-13. A study of place in Gaines' first novel, in which he "transformed the physical landscape of his particular Louisiana into a psychological region in which his characters reflect the vivid palette and subtle shades of colors while they act out tense social dramas of individual, class, and caste struggle for survival."


See also 38.

Haley, Alex


Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins

is part of a tradition in anti-slavery fiction, but two of her mulatto characters (Marie and Iola) are cast in "roles that challenged the anti-miscegenation laws of the United States and legitimized liaisons between white men and black women during the era of slavery."

**Hayden, Robert**


See also 21.

**Hughes, Langston**


See also 49.

*Hurston, Zora Neale*

129. Hemenway, Robert. Introduction. *Dust Tracks on a Road, An Autobiography*. Zora Neale Hurston. 2nd Edition. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. ix-xxxix. (Originally published by Lippincott in 1942, Philadelphia.) Argues that the autobiography presents Hurston as "a woman who lived her life, according to one commentator, 'half in shadow.'" Concludes that the book "fails as autobiography because it is a text deliberately less than its author's talents, a text diminished by her refusal to provide a second or third dimension to the flat surfaces of her adult image."

130. Holt, Elvin. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Race: A Study of Selected Nonfictional Works." *DAI* 44 (1984): 3065A. Argues that the most comprehensive insight into Hurston's view of the race problem comes from a study of her nonfiction. Examines *Tell My Horse* and *Dust Tracks on a Road* as well as selected essays, book reviews, and newspaper articles.

132. Lewis, Vashti Crutcher. “The Declining Significance of the Mulatto Female as Major Character in the Novels of Zora Neale Hurston.” CLA Journal 28.2 (1984): 127-149. Discusses the origins and growth of the mulatto female as an archetypal character in American literature and goes on to argue that Hurston’s novels (especially Jonah’s Gourd Vine and Their Eyes Were Watching God) break down this stereotype and open new vistas for the depiction of black women in American literature.

133. Schmidt, Rita Terezinha. "With My Sword in My Hand": The Politics of Race and Sex in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston." DAI45 (1984): 522A. University of Pittsburgh. Attempts "a feminist reading of her [Hurston’s] fiction, a reading that focuses on the ways in which Hurston portrays the patriarchal relations of dominance and dependency in the sphere of intimacy; and on the ways in which her texts raise equations between sexual oppression and the assertion of manhood, between woman’s subordination and the enslavement of a race and between patriarchal oppression and the white capitalist oppression."

See also 17, 19, 21, 24, 36.

Jackson, Blyden


Joans, Ted


Jones, Gayl

other works (plays, reviews, etc.); and works about Jones: 1) reviews, 2) criticism, and 3) interviews.

See also 23, 38, 50.

Kaufman, Bob


Marshall, Paule


See also 23, 47, 50, 51, 52.

Miller, E. Ethelbert


Morrison, Toni

141. Butler, Robert James. “Open Movement and Selfhood in Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon.” The Centennial Review 28-29.4-1 (1984-85): 58-75. Setting Song of Solomon in an American tradition that portrays the open-ended, nonteleological journey, Butler describes the novel as complex and ambiguous. Rather than coming down firmly on the side of either space or place, Butler argues, Morrison gives the reader a series of choices, delineating both the gains and sacrifices involved with each.
142. Erickson, Peter B. "Images of Nurturance in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby.*" *CLA Journal* 28.1 (1984): 11-32. Argues that "the extent to which *Tar Baby* is a sharp departure from Toni Morrison’s three earlier novels has been exaggerated." Erickson concludes that the identity of a black woman is still Morrison’s primary concern, and pays particular attention to maternal sexuality and generational continuity among black women.


145. Munro, C. Lynn. "The Tattooed Heart and the Serpentine Eye: Morrison’s Choice of an Epigraph for *Sula.*" *Black American Literature Forum* 18.4 (1984): 150-154. Calls for a comparative reading of *Sula* and Tennessee Williams’ *The Rose Tattoo.* "If one reads the two works consecutively, one’s understanding of the novel is enhanced, and it becomes clear that both Morrison and Williams are intent upon examining the ravages of time and misbegotten love."


147. Stein, Karen F. "Toni Morrison’s *Sula*: A Black Woman’s Epic." *Black American Literature Forum* 18.4 (1984): 146-150. Stein argues that Morrison “typically frames her tales within the mythic narrative structures,” and then reverses her readers’ expectation of these structures. In this light, the article examines ironic structuring and character pairing in *Sula.*

See also 13, 14, 23, 24, 32, 38, 41, 50, 51, 54.

*Shange, Ntozake*

148. Mitchell, Carolyn. "‘A Laying on of Hands’: Transcending the City in Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf.*" *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist*
"The importance of "the modern American city as place" in Shange's choreopoem.

Reed, Ishmael

149. Fox, Robert Elliot. "Blacking the Zero: Toward a Semiotics of Neo-HooDoo." *Black American Literature Forum* 18.3 (1984): 95-99. Fox proposes to go "behind the words to the signs and symbols" in Reed's work. Much discussion of typography and word play and its relation to Neo-HooDoo. Ranging from Afro-Brazilian religions to Neo-Platonism to Derrida, Fox concludes that Reed has helped to reappropriate literature to the people by "rooting novelistic language in popular speech and culture."

See also 21, 28, 29, 38.

Thomas, Joyce Carol

150. Yalom, Marilyn and Margo Davis, eds. *Women Writers of the West Coast: Speaking of Their Lives and Careers*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1983. 31-39. Excerpts from a public dialogue between Joyce Carol Thomas and Diane Wood Middlebrook in which Thomas discusses her background, her work, her writing career, women writers and their influences on her, etc. Quotes long passages from poems. Ends with a selected bibliography of her work.

Toomer, Jean


See also 21, 22, 24, 25, 49.

Tolson, Melvin B.


to be the beginning of a longer work on Tolson, Hansell discusses the depiction of John Laugart, Hideho Heights, and Mister Starks in *Harlem Gallery*. Each of these artists is "fundamentally optimistic" and embodies the principles outlined in the two opening sections of the poem.


**Thurman, Wallace**


**Walker, Alice**

157. Davis, Thadious. "Alice Walker's Celebration of Self in Southern Generations." *Women Writers of the Contemporary South*. Ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984. 39-53. "While Walker's paradigm communities are nearly always black, rural, and Southern they become viable emblems by means of her creation of familial and social generations that underscore her concerns with familial identity, continuity and rupture, and with social roles, order and change. In shaping her fiction and much of her poetry according to patterns of generations, she has established a concrete means of portraying who her people are and what their lives mean."


See also 21, 23, 32, 38, 40, 45, 50, 51, 52, 54.

**Ward, Theodore**

163. Brady, Owen E. “Theodore Ward’s *Our Lan’* From the Slavery of Melodrama to the Freedom of Tragedy.” *Callaloo* 7.2 (1984): 40-56. Examines the different versions of Ward’s play, and concludes that through the different versions of *Our Lan’* “we can document the individual artist’s struggle with the cultural and social forces that conditioned him and the theater of his era.”

**Wheatley, Phillis**


**Williams, John A.**

165. Muller, Gilbert H. *John A. Williams*. Boston: Twayne, 1984. The first chapter is essentially biographical, but the other eight chapters are devoted to his nonfiction prose as well as fiction.

**Wright, Jay**

166. Hollander, John. “Poetry in Review.” *Yale Review* 74 (Nov., 1984): ix-xxiv. “Jay Wright’s poetry is some of the most original and powerful that is written in America,” says Hollander in his review essay of new collections of poems. The focus on Wright’s poetry (xvi-xix) is *Explications/Interpretations*, which “moves beyond” what we find in his earlier poetry: “the framework of rituals and fables of the Dogon people...”
of West Africa.” The poetry in Explications generates “some of its own ad hoc songs and epistemological dances.”

See also 25.

**Wright, Richard**

167. Butler, Robert James. “Wright’s Native Son and Two Novels by Zola: A Comparative Study.” *Black American Literature Forum* 18.3 (1984): 100-105. After making a general case for the relationship between Wright and Zola, Butler explores some specific similarities between Native Son on the one hand and Thérèse Racquin and La Bête Humaine, on the other. He connects Thérèse to Native Son through the apathy and violence of fear, and La Bête through inverted sexual imagery.


169. Coles, Robert A. “Richard Wright’s The Outsider: A Novel in Transition.” *Modern Language Studies* 13.3 (1984): 53-61. Drawing heavily on biography, the article argues that The Outsider: should be considered an important transition point in Richard Wright’s literary career. Coles demonstrates that the book shows Wright broadening and deepening his intellectual preoccupations while shifting his mode of expression toward nonfiction.


171. Ellison, Ralph. “Remembering Richard Wright.” *Delta*. No. 18 (April 1984): 1-13. Recalls his close relationship with Wright and comments on some of Wright’s work. Concludes that Wright “was sometimes too passionate, I think now as I offer you the memories of a middle-aged man. But at least Wright wanted and demanded as much as any novelist, any artist, should want: he wanted to be tested in terms of his talent . . . he had the feeling that his vision of American life, and his ability to project it eloquently justified his being considered among the best of American writers. And in this crazy, mixed-up country . . . it turns out that he was right.” The rest of this issue of Delta is devoted to articles
about Ralph Ellison and his work.

172. Gallagher, Kathleen. “Bigger’s Great Leap to the Figurative.” *CLA Journal* 27.3 (1984): 293-314. *Native Son* is about the protagonist’s “perception of images. It is about his struggle to understand and control the metaphor of his own life.”

173. Howard, William. “Richard Wright’s Flood Stories and the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927: Social and Historical Backgrounds.” *Southern Literary Journal* 16.2. (1984): 44-62. Attempts to judge Wright’s flood stories in *Uncle Tom’s Children* and *Eight Men* in terms of the political and social interest the flood of 1927 evoked in the U. S. A. and abroad. Many of the stories recorded in black periodicals correspond with those of Wright. He “capitalized on the flood ...” using it as a vehicle to express the vivid and haunting impressions of his youth within the context of his newly found social consciousness. The result is a compelling and remarkably accurate portrait of the Southern black experience.


See also 17, 21, 41, 42, 43, 49, 141.

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