African American Literature, 1989–94: An Annotated Bibliography

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An Annotated Bibliography

R. BAXTER MILLER, TRACY BUTTS, and SHARON JONES

This annotated bibliography, which covers the years 1989–94, supplements an earlier ADE Bulletin article (Jerry Ward, “Selected Bibliography of Afro-American Literature,” ADE Bulletin 78 [1984]: 40–42). We have compiled a list of books reviewed in the Langston Hughes Review, College Language Association Journal, Obsidian II, African American Review, and Callaloo. Primary documents included here range from the Frederick Douglass papers, letters by African American Union soldiers, and the journals of Charles Chesnutt to conversations with the contemporary poet Nikki Giovanni. New collections on the literature of the Harlem Renaissance cover Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, and the mercurial George S. Schuyler. In drama comes the promise of a kinder, gentler Ed Bullins. Among the academic modern poets, the stars of Lorna Goodison and Yusef Komunyakaa are on the rise. The persistent poetry of Pinkie Gordon Lane remains an important transition between living generations. African American fiction, which has received disproportionately little critical emphasis for at least the last seventy years, now includes valuable novels by Tina McElroy Ansa, Dori Sanders, and Brent White. The voices of Leon Forrest, Ernest Gaines, and Gloria Naylor, sounding the way for these writers and many others, have set a tone of excellence. A scholarly return to nineteenth-century texts bolsters Claudia Tate’s study of womanist volumes and William Andrews’s collection of essays on Douglass. Eric Sundquist’s somewhat similar volume on Douglass is more of a historical study. Elsewhere, Richard Barksdale on Langston Hughes is the perfect complement to Mark Busby on Ralph Ellison. Finally, Anne DuCille points to the direction that contemporary black feminism might take in response to Tate’s historical research. Despite the delightful exceptions of Mark Reid in film, John Roberts in folklore, and bell hooks in womanist studies, nearly all sense of cultural nationalism has disappeared. Postnationalism and postessentialism have displaced the presumed monolith, but at what cost? Does hybridity suggest a gain? Can culture be revealed as agriculture? Movement in new directions would help lift the unspoken ban on the literary voices of the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, black male writers since 1950 might begin to receive critical acclaim. Today the exciting advances in critical theory—and even in historical scholarship for a change—require more than entrepreneurial courage. How does historical consciousness take beautiful shape in words? Hence there is still important work to be done.

Anthologies


Short stories and excerpts from novels by Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Rudolph Fisher, Nella Larsen, Wallace Thurman, six writers who seem likely to be included in the canons of African American and American literary history and who were largely responsible for furthering the Harlem Renaissance’s goal: to change Americans’ views of race and modern life.


A collection of works by over a hundred poets inspired by jazz forms. All the contributors are modern or contemporary, but one wonders about a chronology that lists James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka before Langston Hughes. It is unclear why the editors conflate many literary and cultural traditions under the category of jazz forms. Some white poets are also represented, but the editors do not specify the culture or identity of any of the writers.


The authors are, respectively, Professor of English and Director of the Institute for African American Studies at the University of Georgia, doctoral candidate in the department of English at the University of Georgia, and Assistant Professor of English at Clemson University.
The volume, struggling with the question of whether African American poets are first poets or blacks, spans fifty years of modern African American poetry and covers nearly three dozen writers, from Robert Hayden to Elizabeth Alexander. Preference is for witty modern imagism. The anthology attempts to include poets who have not received mainstream critical acclaim.


Six screenplays created and performed between 1973 and 1989: Bill Gunn’s *Ganja and Hess*, Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*, Kathleen Collins’s *Losing Ground*, Julie Dash’s *Illusions*, Sharon Larkin’s *A Different Image*, and Charles Lane’s *Sidewalk Stories*.


Short stories by Harlem Renaissance women including famous writers and others, such as Marita Bonner, who have been recently rediscovered.


This volume, dedicated to the African American lesbian writer Audre Lorde, presents more than 120 poems by scores of poets from various cultures.

**Fiction**


Three sisters return to Mulberry, Georgia, for their mother’s funeral. During the course of the novel, which spans three days, the sisters and their father try to recover from the mother’s long-standing cruelty and domination. The family members’ stories unfold through flashbacks.


Forrest’s fourth novel, which employs a number of oral styles, is set in the mid 1960s. Over 1,100 pages long, it recounts a week in the life of an aspiring playwright who styles, is set in the mid 1960s. Over 1,100 pages long, it recounts a week in the life of an aspiring playwright who


A novel of the black bourgeoisie, an insular, little-known group with its own version of high-society rituals. Having struggled for civil rights, members of this group eventually raised children who attend integrated schools and who tired of their parents’ antedated social practices.


Naylor’s fourth novel, set in Brooklyn in 1948 and narrated in the first and third persons, revolves around the lives of a café owner and the wayward patrons who frequent the café because they are in search of shelter, redemption, or a fresh start. The mysticism of Naylor’s earlier novel *Mama Day* reappears.


Sanders’s second novel is the history of a South Carolina family. The protagonist marries during her teens and works to buy a house unbeknownst to her husband, who is fighting in World War II. Later, abandoned by her husband, the protagonist must raise her five children alone.


Reprints two novellas that illustrate Schuyler’s creativity in narrating the deep concerns of African Americans.


Wade’s first novel is the story of a young black man who shoots himself because of racial self-hatred and an inability to deal with the pressures and overt racism of the corporate world. The young man’s face is partially paralyzed in this botched suicide attempt. The novel takes the form of a letter the young man writes to a long-lost friend while recovering in the hospital.

**Poetry**


The seventy-eight poems range from careful stanzas and quatrains to free verse. Themes include Catholic ritual, renunciation, penitence, and ceremony. Some uses of the vernacular seem contrived, and there is often too much modernist scholarly allusion. Nevertheless, “My Last Poem(Again),” “And You Being So Abundantly Blessed with Names,” and “Mother the Great Stones Got to Move” convey authentic revelation.


Forty poems, often with sparse, crisply detailed images. Some depict the irony of Southern history using the vernacular.
The Pulitzer Prize–winning volume includes some poems related to the poet's experience in the Vietnam War and many others that distill the meaning of his childhood in Bogalusa, Louisiana.


The volume includes poems about adolescence and love. Most of the poems are intensely confessional lyrics about family and death. One metaphor involving space-walking is particularly captivating.

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**Drama**


Includes *I Am Lucy Terry, High John Da Conqueror: The Musical*, *The Mystery of Phyllis Wheatley, City Preacher, Joanne*, and *Salaam, Huey Newton, Salaam*. Unlike much of Bullins's other work, these plays contain little profundity and present positive images of women.

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**Criticism**


An incisive and useful volume about the life and work of the famous abolitionist. Includes essays by Margaret Fuller, "Negro" critics such as Kelly Miller and J. Saunders Redding, and a variety of structuralists and poststructuralists such as Albert E. Stone, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Robert B. Stepto, Eric Sundquist, and Deborah E. McDowell.


Miller writes, "First appear [Barksdale's] discussions on literary canons as well as on blackness and on humane principles beyond canons; then follow his carefully measured inquiries into the literary forms and metaphors of survival in African American history; subsequently his broad praiseshong for black women writers makes for a nice complement to his wonderful finale on Langston Hughes" (12–13).


The volume explores dramatic innovations at the interfaces of theory, performance, and traditions. Divided into sections on life and work, intersecting dramatic traditions, interpretive approaches, and performance as a collaborative art.


The author, examining Ellison's entire career, proposes that Ellison's background, set against the southwestern frontier, encapsulates the pioneering idea of infinite possibility. For Ellison, language is a means to freedom. Chapters on geography and biography, early sources, *Invisible Man*, literary antecedents, later stories, nonfiction, and achievement and influence.


Presents captivating portraits and thumbnail biographies for nearly a hundred famous thinkers, musicians, educators, writers, athletes, actors, and artists, from W. E. B. Du Bois to Billy Dee Williams.


Chapters on coupling conventions, lack of literary passion, ideal estate of marriage, blues notes and black sexuality, bourgeois blues and wedding bells of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen, and modern marriage. Authors discussed include Harriet Wilson, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Anna Julia Cooper, Pauline Hopkins, Frances Harper, Jessie Fauset, Zora Hurston, Nella Larsen, and Dorothy West. The author argues that critical practice should transcend old assumptions about the black experience and black talent.


A compilation of reviews and essays claiming that Wright may have been largely responsible for shaping African American literary modernism. Describes perceptions of Wright among his contemporaries and demonstrates why Wright's works have generated controversy and sustained interest over the years.


Jones reasserts that African American writers fuse European and Euramerican written traditions with "their own distinctive oral and aural forms" (i). Among the writers covered are Paul Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Sherley A. Williams, Michael Harper, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Loyle Hairston, Ann Petry, Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, and Ernest Gaines.

This collection of essays focuses on major figures in black gospel music such as Charles A. Tinder, Lucie Campbell Williams, Thomas A. Dorsey, William H. Brewster, Sr., and Roberta Martin.


Chapters on Native Son, Invisible Man, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, and *Beloved*. Readings often impose Euroamerican contexts and ideas.


Thirteen solid essays by authors such as Donald B. Gibson, Wilson J. Moses, Sterling Stuckey, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Jenny Franchot, Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Carla Peterson, and Richard Yarborough. The emphasis is historical and factual.


Asks why, as resurgent racism threatened the well-being of black Americans, African American women novelists used idealized bourgeois courtship and marriage as literary conventions for social reform. Considers fiction by Pauline Hopkins, Emma Kelley, Amelia Johnson, Katherine Tillman, and Frances Harper.


An introduction to Alice Walker’s life and to her writings, including her novels, short stories, critical essays, and poems. Winchell’s goal is “to reconstruct Walker’s personal and triumphant struggle for survival” and to show “that her male characters also grow and change” (ix).

**Cultural Studies**


Sections on black popular culture; on race, gender, and class; and on black religion. The oversimplification of black racial unity is problematic, and Dyson overlooks the failure of a Marxist paradigm to explain the greatness of African American spirit during the 1930s and 1960s.


Focuses on history and social consequences of minstrelsy.


Virtually all readers of American fiction have been “positioned as white” (xii). What constitutes literary whiteness and blackness? How do the embedded assumptions in English work?


Asserts that since the Jeffersonian moment, Americans have refused to read the racial blackness of the national text, that whites subconsciously fear an American community without racist construction and believe such a community would cease to be America. Chapters on race and intertextuality, C. L. R. James, Melvin B. Tolson, Amiri Baraka, James Weldon Johnson, the blues, and slave girls and women. The postcolonial reading, by imposing a white American context, reduces African American literature to an American subtext.


Covers the interconnected histories of black-oriented films that are controlled and marketed by whites and those that are produced by blacks. Chapters on early African American film companies, African American comedy film, family film and black writers in Hollywood, black action film, black comedy on the verge of a genre breakdown, black feminists and the independent film, and male-directed new black independent cinema.


Explores the dynamic influences of African and European music on each other. Organized into sections treating the periods 1619–1870s, 1870s–1950s, and 1950s–1970s. This edition extends coverage into the contemporary era.


Asserts that, despite claims for difference among Africans, black cultures resembled one another considerably more than they resembled European cultures. First, the African sources of trickster, conjurer, biblical figures, and “bad” men were transformed under slavery and in the late nineteenth century. Second, Africans in the New World recognized the deep structures in cultural values that connected them. Finally, “African people in America did not abandon this value system as an influence of folk heroic creation, but rather transformed it to reflect new realities and insights about the shape of both time and history” (1).


Explains the cultural and socioeconomic situations that foster the development and growth of rap music. Also places rap music within the tradition of spirituals, slave dances, blues lyrics, Mardi Gras parades, Jamaican patois, toasts and signifying.

Essays on redefining the American canon, on the oral dimensions of American literature, and on critical and historical perspectives, and bibliographies emphasizing American Indian, African American, Asian American, Chicano and Chicana, and Puerto Rican literatures.


Published on the occasion of an exhibit of Lawrence’s painting. Essays by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Lonnie B. Bunch III and Spencer R. Crew, Deborah Willis, Jeffrey C. Stewart, Diane Tepfer, Patricia Hills, Elizabeth Steele and Susana M. Halpine, and Stephen Bennett Phillips; an exhibition checklist; selected bibliography; and an index.


Divided into sections on theory and criticism; gender, sexuality, and black images; urban context; and post-nationalism and essentialism. The thirty contributors include Cornel West, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston A. Baker, Jr., John Jeffries, Sherley Anne Williams, Julianne Malveaux, Hazel V. Carby, Manning Marable, and Angela Davis.


West juxtaposes his Ethiopian roots with his life in the United States. He rediscovers the obvious fact that blacks are the most disillusioned they have been since the 1920s but asserts his belief in the continuing fight for democratic ideals and for human dignity. Sections on cultural criticism and race, philosophy and political engagement, law and culture, and racial explanation.


Situating himself at once in Ethiopia and the United States, West describes the double standard applied to the anti-Semitic statements by the black nationalist Leonard Jeffries and by the right-wing extremist Patrick J. Buchanan. West, like political integrationists such as Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, trusts in the healing power of American democracy.

**Biography**


The life of a gay poet and playwright who epitomized the ability to triumph over sorrow. Despite his alcoholism, which in his later years obscured his talents and damaged his friendships, Dodson remains a preeminent figure in African-American theater history.

**Papers, Journals, Interviews, and Letters**


Sixty-two of the orations Frederick Douglass delivered between 1864 and 1880. Also includes two interviews granted to reporters and an address to Congress.


A detailed look into the early life of the author of *Conjure Woman*, *The Wife of His Youth*, *The House behind the Cedars*, and *The Marrow of Tradition*. Written between 1874 and 1882, spanning his sixteenth to his twenty-fourth year.


Twenty-seven interviews, some previously published in popular magazines and newspapers, others in academic journals. Reveals Giovanni’s personal convictions and sheds light on her neglect by literary critics.


Chronologically arranged interviews that were either printed or broadcast illuminate Wright’s psyche and thought over nearly twenty-five years.


Topics range from the experience of black soldiers in white regiments that fought in the South to the navy at the war’s end. Most letters included were written by free men who were Union soldiers.

**Note**

This bibliography is one of a series on multicultural literatures that was initiated by the MLA Committee on the Literatures and Languages of America. In addition to the bibliographies on African American literature and Asian American literature appearing in this issue, bibliographies on Chicano and Chicana literature and Puerto Rican literature appeared in the Winter 1996 issue of *ADE Bulletin*. A bibliography on Native American literature is scheduled to appear later this year. This series updates an earlier series, which appeared in *ADE Bulletin* in 1983–88.
This selected, annotated subject bibliography includes twenty titles of children’s literature that feature an African-American character prominently in the story or a story that authentically describes African-American history. The books included are suited for children in Kindergarten through second grade. @article{Blessinger2015AfricanAmericanLF, title={African-American literature for the young child: A selected annotated bibliography}, author={Kelly D Blessinger}, journal={Codex: the Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL}, year={2015}, volume={3}, pages={25-48} }. Kelly D Blessinger. Published 2015. Sociology. Codex: the Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL. African American literature, body of literature written by Americans of African descent. Beginning in the pre-Revolutionary War period, African American writers have engaged in a creative, if often contentious, dialogue with American letters. The result is a literature rich in expressive subtlety.Â E. Maynard Adams Professor of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Co-editor of The Norton Anthology of African American Literature and The Oxford Companion to African American See Article History. African American literature, body of literature written by Americans of African descent. Beginning in the pre-Revolutionary War period, African American writers have engaged in a creative, if often contentious, dialogue with American letters. African American literature dates back to African slaves’ earliest arrival in the New World in 1639, when they forged a language and literature of their own. At the heart of this body of work lies the African American vernacular tradition. This tradition includes oral forms of expression existing prior to African slaves’ abilities to read and write in the English language.Â Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) was the first African American to publish a book and the first to win international acclaim as a writer. Similar to her predecessor Lucy Terry (1724–1821) whose poem “Bars Fight” is the earliest known work of literature by an African American, Wheatley was born in Africa and sold into slavery in America, and yet was able to write poems in her adopted English language. African-American Literature from Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes, Booker T. Washington, Charles Chesnutt, W.E.B. DuBois, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Ida B. Wells, as well as relevant literary works like Twelve Years a Slave, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Our Countrymen in Chains, A Dark Brown Dog, and Desiree's Baby. Reference documents include the Emancipation Proclamation, U.S. Constitution, Constitutional Amendments, Reconstruction Amendments, and the U.S. Bill of Rights.Â Long may our rally be Love, Light and Liberty; Ever our banner the banner of Peace. - Frederick Douglass, 1847. W.E.B. Du Bois, Infographics of African-American Life.