

ISSUES IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

by

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What is of greater interest to us here is to inquire how it is possible that up to now Marxist-inspired culture has, with a care and insistence that it could better employ elsewhere, guiltily denied or covered up a simple truth. This truth is, that just as there cannot exist a class political economy, but only a class criticism of political economy, so too there cannot be founded a class aesthetic, art, or architecture, but only a class criticism of the aesthetic, of art, of architecture, of the city itself.

Manfredo Tafuri, *ARCHITECTURE AND UTOPIA: DESIGN AND CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT*, p. 179.

It would be inappropriate in 1988, especially in the English-speaking world or in that world dominated by the hegemony of English language literary culture, to write an article or an essay on literary matters without paying due homage to the colossal figure of Raymond Williams, who unexpectedly passed away early this year at the early age of 66. The achievements of Williams is in many ways beyond comparison in our time: he opened the concepts of culture and literature to the material and historical processes of our time. In so doing, he conceptually indicated the historical elasticity or the historicity of the concept of literature. In his magisterial book, *The Country and the City*, which both Perry Anderson and Edward W. Said consider to be his most original and brilliant among the list of his incomparable books, Williams attempted to articulate literature as a world system: conceptualizing English-language literature within the former British colonial empire as everywhere having a center with no peripheral areas. In other words, this book is one of the most remarkable acts ever undertaken to democratize the structure of literature on a world-wide scale. It is very exhilarating to see Williams theorize within the same literary system the differential historical and cultural tempos of the various national literatures represented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, R. K. Narayan and the English country-house poems. It may be that this book represents the first example of what Fredric Jameson has been advocating recently within the cultural complications of post-modernism: the establishing of the internationalism of national situation. Williams, by writing *The Country and the City*, may have carried in practice what Jameson was to theorize fifteen years later because of the historical blockages within postmodernism. Williams had a

catholicity of vision of astonishing depths, encompassing practically everything material within its historical grids. There is still much to be learned from his practice of cultural materialism . It is the wide-angle vision we on the African Left honor. In a very profound way, Williams is a central part of us in Africa. It is the deep-rooted sadness in us, which the passing away of Williams has triggered, that makes us resolutely reject the recent attempt of Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe to limit the significance of Williams only for the European Left.

Williams' book, *Marxism and Literature* , is one of those books which demands being read and re-read for it is an inexhaustible source of brilliant historical and theoretical insights. One of them is the following: "We have certainly still to speak of the `dominant' and the `effective', and in these senses of the hegemonic. But we find that we have also to speak, and indeed with further differentiation of each, of the `residual' and the `emergent', which in any real process, and at any moment in the process, are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characters of the `dominant'." Utilizing this historical principle of the dialectical opposition of the residual and the emergent on one side, against the effective and the dominant on the other side, it is possible to open-up a new genealogical structure of our literary history. Still remaining within Williams' complex intellectual landscape, another principle can be drawn from a particular segment of his book, *Keywords* , when he writes: "In relation to the past, literature is still a relatively general word: Carlyle and Ruskin, for example who did not write novels or poems or plays, belong to English literature. But there has been a steady distinction and separation of other kinds of writing--philosophy, essays, history, and so on--which may or may not possess literary merit or be of literary interest . . . but which are not now normally described as literature, which may be understood as well-written books of an imaginative or creative kind." It is clear from this excerpt that the constituent contents and forms of literature are variable and their structure is constantly changing and shifting in relation to particular history dynamics. This is a fundamental point from Williams.

The present political struggles in our country, beginning with the workers' strike in Durban in 1973 to the current forms of struggle waged by the United Democratic Front and COSATU since their banning early this year (1988), has given emergence to and formation of new cultural processes on our literary landscape. There are several of these new cultural formations coming from present political gestations, but the ones concerning us here are the most pertinent and relevant for our purposes: the coming into being of workers' poetry in the African languages, represented by Black Mamba Rising (Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo and Nise Malange); the emergence of Black Afrikaans, whose representative figure is Hein Willemsse; the advent of the strong female voice in the genre of the novel, the premier practitioners being Gladys Thomas, Miriam Tladi, Lauretta Ngcobo, among others; the rekindling of the

consciousness of historical feminism among certain writers, the exemplary historico-literary constellations have to a large extent been well captured in the special issue of last year's *TriQuarterly* called *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art*. It is these new constellations which have shaped a new configuration of our literary history. Probably at a tangent by itself, but still a central element of this constellation, is the emergence of Don Mattera as one of the strongest poetic voices within our rich literary culture.

The emergence of these new constellations within our present literary context has facilitated the material conditions for a new reading or conceptual shaping of our literary history. The first question that arises is where do we locate our literary origins! The standard response of many white literary historians in South Africa has been to associate our collective literary (literacy) origins with the penetration of European languages in our country: in other words, with the penetration of cultural imperialism. Perhaps the pretext written literary origins. Even Stephen Gray's very impressive book, *Southern African Literature*, seems to locate our written literary origins in Camoen's epic poem which touches on Portuguese imperialism during the advent of 'great discoveries'. A historically more plausible location of our written literary origins is in the writings of 'scribblings' in Khoikhoi-San cave paintings. The complex structure of these cave paintings are still shrouded in controversy and mystery. But the effect of locating our written literary origins in these writings would be to extend and expand the longitudinal plane of our literary lineages; and this would have the simultaneous effect of deepening the conceptual structure of our literary history. This would also give a new cultural and conceptual form to what literature is for us South Africans, given the present new cultural formations opening up new historical spaces. After all the writings of Williams have taught us that the concept of what literature is, the very conception that exercises enormous hegemonic hold in many Third World countries, was the invention of the European bourgeoisie. It is a concept that reflects bourgeois cultural complications and hegemonies rather than our own historical cultural complications as South Africans.

Let me add before going any further, that the documentation of these complicated historical processes is not easy because of the cultural politics of Apartheid. But this historical location of our literary origins in the Khoikhoi-San historico-cultural complex would also enrich the structure of the history of writing. The importance of the Khoikhoi-San cultural complex has also important implications for the writing of African historiography. It is well-known that the great thesis of Cheikh Anta Diop has been that the Egyptian civilization was the invention of the African-Negro. This thesis was first formulated by the Liberian scholar, Edward W. Blyden, in the nineteenth century and the American man of letters, W. E.B. Du Bois, in the early part of the twentieth-century. To the Greeks, like Herodotus, this was a self-evident fact. To prove this thesis, Cheikh Anta Diop,

who tragically passed away two years ago, has examined the linguistic structures of the various languages which were dominant in the area of Egypt during this civilization. Diop has found many similarities and parallels between the linguistic structure of these languages and those in other parts of Africa. Perhaps there may be also similarities between the linguistic structures of these languages and those of the Khoikhoi and San languages. Within this continental context, South Africa would be able to play its role in locating our origins as African people in the Egyptian civilization. It is here perhaps that we black South Africans can make an important self-criticism of ourselves: in as much as we today criticize Nadine Gordimer for not having learned to speak, and even perhaps write, at least one African language, we should criticize ourselves for having not as yet learned the Khoikhoi and San languages. We should resist the temptation to put the whole blame on Apartheid. The learning of the languages of these First Peoples will be one of the important cultural and literary projects in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The importance of the Khoikhoi-San cultural complex in our literary history goes beyond its location as the origins of our literariness as South Africans, for it is within this cultural complex also that a particular segment of our literary culture has developed. Both our origination and the developmental processes of our literary culture is inseparable from this great culture (two cultures which have constituted themselves into a historical unity). For it is within this cultural complex that the Afrikaans language found its gestation. In a recent book on the history of the Khoikhoi people, and American historian, Richard Elphick, has written: ". . . it was not the passage of time, but the process of being spoken by slaves and Khoikhoi which hastened the transformation of Dutch into Afrikaans." It is clear from this book that the origins of Afrikaans is within the multinational context of black people rather than of white South Africans. This confirms what Breyten Breytenbach has written in another context: "Afrikaans is a Creole language. . . . The language, however, was born in the mouths of those - imported slaves, local populations - who had no command of no European tongue and who needed to communicate in a lingua franca among themselves . . ." Richard Elphick is well-aware of the controversy surrounding the origins of this language. Beyond the imperial cultural politics of Apartheid, this question of the origins of the Afrikaans language will become historically irrelevant and politically implausible. But for the moment, then, there is a direct line of continuity between the origins of this language and the historical emergence of black Afrikaans literature in recent years. Keyan Tomaselli has touched on the effect and impact of the emergence of black Afrikaans on South African cultural systems in a recent essay. This question of the origins of the Afrikaans makes it very questionable the wisdom of a recent essay on a particular segment of white Afrikaans literary history by J.M. Coetzee and Stephen Gray in a two-volume book called, *African Literature in the European Languages*, edited by Albert Gerard and published in Budapest in 1986. The implication here is that Afrikaans

is a European language and not an African language, which in fact is what it is.

Given these new cultural inventions, emergences, formulations and discoveries, it becomes historically and materially possible to examine our literary history as to who politically and culturally Afrikaans was confiscated from the Khoikhoi-San people and from the slaves by the Afrikaners. Is it even historically legitimate to call them Afrikaners! What was remarkable about the Khoikhoi and San peoples is that they never abandoned their particular languages while they gave gestation to the emergence of the Afrikaans language. This has salutary lessons for us Africans today, given the astonishing hegemony of the English language (literary and otherwise) over the African languages in contemporary South Africa. Perhaps the publication of *Black Mamba Rising* (a collection of poetry in Zulu by two poets and a poetess, and note, not necessarily Zulu poetry ; a distinction of fundamental importance given the cultural aberrations of the Inkatha movement - the distortion of cultural processes within nationalistic structures) by a segment of a very political conscious nationalistic structures) by a segment of a very political conscious South African working class (proletariat) marks the advent of a completely new literary process: the beginnings of the long revolution towards the overthrowing of the dominance and hegemony of English literary culture in our country. The fundamentalness of the literary project of Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo and Nise Malange relates it to the present historico-cultural project of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

But to revert back for a moment to the historical and cultural importance of the Khoikhoi-San cultural complex, for here lies an inexhaustible well of cultural resources. Richard Elphick indicates in his book that the Khoikhoi language seems to possess a very rich linguistic structure which facilitates the learning of other languages: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Khoikhoi learned French, Portuguese and Dutch without difficulties. It would seem then, that although this language is complex and difficult to learn, it is elastic enough to 'accommodate' other languages. The Khoikhoi and San languages have had a strong impact on some African languages: we have in mind the existence of clicks in some of the Nguni languages. Given the cultural richness of these languages (Khoikhoi and San), one of the fundamental literary projects within our literary history, would be to recover the literature in these languages and situate it at the center of our cultural and historical experience. Such an undertaking would make clear why Laurens van der Post over thirty years ago in *The Lost World of the Kalari* was correct to call them the First People. Indeed, they are the First People of our literary, cultural and historical experiences. It is not implausible or preposterous to suppose that perhaps in post-Apartheid South Africa it may be necessary to choose one of these languages as one of our national languages should the aberrations of nationalism make it politically impossible to choose some of the apparent candidates for such a position. This

would make possible the placing in deeper focus the historico-cultural experiences of the First People. This action would militate against all forms of nationalisms and chauvinisms by indicating that South Africa first and foremost belongs to the First People. This, of course, is not to imply that South Africa does not belong to all of us South Africans. The central incorporation of the literary culture of the First People to a commanding position within our South African cultural experience, would in fundamental ways re-shape and re-structure the literary lineages apparent in our literary history.

The recent emergence of black Afrikaans and its literary forms as historical constructs makes the singular importance of the Khoikhoi-San cultural complex even more apparent. Is there any similarity between the literary forms realized by contemporary black Afrikaans and the oratory or its poetical rudimentary forms in the mouth of slaves or the Khoikhoi? Such a question reveals a different configuration of the structure of our literary history than that would be apparent if we concerned ourselves with the literary shapings effected by white Afrikaans. A fundamental question what needs to be posed is the following: is there really a fundamental difference between black Afrikaans and white Afrikaans to justify such historical differentiation beyond the schizoid cultural politics of Apartheid. Can a reconciliation between the two `cultural structures' be effected only by the cultural politics of the proletariat ? There can be no doubt that the flowering of black Afrikaans has been a cultural mirror for a certain segment of our working class. What historical literary lineages will black Afrikaans reconstruct for itself in contradistinction from that drawn by white Afrikaans: will both of them quarrel as to who is the legitimate descendant of the legacy of Eugene Marais!

Perhaps the greatest challenge posed to us Africans by the coming into being of black Afrikaans is the necessity for us to learn and study Afrikaans (whether the black and white distinction in this context will still hold is unclear). It is the paradoxical cultural consequences of the Soweto Uprising of 1976 which have facilitated the emergence of black Afrikaans, just as the politics of unity in post-Apartheid will perhaps eliminate the racial designations. Extending the logic further, in a truly democratic South Africa, when all class distinctions would have been eliminated, Zulu literature, Afrikaans literature, Xhosa literature, English literature, Ndebele literature, etc., and only class literatures written in Zulu, Afrikaans, Xhosa, English, Ndebele, etc., will remain to give true expression to a multiplicity of forms or to an authentic historical formalisms.

Black Mamba Rising is a prefiguration of the festival of forms or the poetry of voices which is just beyond the horizon, because of present-day historical blockages. One such blockage is the hegemony of the English language and its literary forms supported by ruling ideologies and the ruling classes in our country. The one real historical mission opened by this anthology of poetry is to

challenge the dominance of this imperial language which has been historically imposed on many of us. This challenge is articulated from the class position of the working class, which makes the publication of this anthology one of the unique events in our literary history. The only serious danger here is the possible coopting of these three historic poets into writing in the English language. In another context, we intend to analyze this very important literary text, for it seems to mark a particular threshold in our literary history. Nevertheless, a few things can be mentioned here: first, it is remarkable that this text has emerged from a supposedly Inkatha territory to call for class unity across and against ethnicity or ethnic identifications - in other words, whereas the reactionary Inkatha movement identifies the Zulu language with nationalism (even worse, ethnic nationalism), our three historic poets situate the Zulu language in the struggle for socialism and in the call for the unity of Africa (continentalism); secondly, perhaps for the first time in our literary history, there is a unity on a high historical plane, between a great African language and a progressive working class consciousness - mind you, this synthesis is realized not in order to develop a historical thesis, but rather, is developed in the structure of the creative process itself; thirdly, the literary text poses the question of the possible integration of the various literary histories constituted by the creativity in the African languages, for in the text itself there is an intercrossing or intersection of two literary traditions in that being Qabula we can justifiably search for Mqhayi as well as behind Hlatshwayo we can look for Vilakazi. *Black Mamba Rising* then, presents the historical formulation that the various literary histories in existence within our cultural space can only be integrated into each other from the perspective of the working class; as for their possible 'synthesis', that can be achievable in a totally classless society, beyond the metaphysics of ethnicity, where a singular historical consciousness will be the ruling order.

What makes *Black Mamba Rising* truly astonishing, among other things, is that while it is a remarkable act of recovery or of restoration of literature in the African languages in South Africa, it is also simultaneously a serious questioning of that literary tradition, for it poses to that very tradition the question of working class consciousness and the question of political unity. It is from these two perspectives that the continent of literary history in the African languages can be re-examined and reformulated. But this is a task for another occasion. Perhaps the simultaneous existence within the same temporal and cultural space of the *Black Mamba Rising* poets and a collective school of black female South African novelists (Miriam Tlali, Lauretta Ngcobo, Gladys Thomas and others) is not merely a historical coincidence, but an expression of a profound dialectical unity, in that whereas one literary constellation indicates the existence of a historico-literary problem, the other literary constellation presents possible options towards resolving that problem. For in actuality, these three novelists and short-story writers in their creative works present the question of the legitimacy of African

writers continuing to write in the English language in displacement of the African languages: in other words, their work presents the preliminary indications of the beginnings of the disintegration of the hegemonic hold of the English language in the imagination of African writers. It is this historical question which constitutes them as a collective school. Their writings, that is the historical logic governing them rather than in their creative structures, make clear that the hegemonic hold of English language literary culture in South Africa is directly related to the existence of the capitalist order in our country. After all, the penetration of the English language in our country was on the back of English imperialism and colonialism. The dominance of the English language in our country is an expression of the continuing dominance of imperialism proper and of cultural imperialism. Here again, the importance of Ngugi wa Thiong'o within the context of the continental cultural politics is absolutely clear. Clearly then, the neocolonialism prevailing in much of Africa is not that much different from the internal colonialism prevailing in our country.

These three writers continue a literary tradition which has been present in our literary history since the introduction of European literary forms into our national creative imagination: namely, the creative usage of the novel genre by our black female writers and white female writers to capture, express or articulate a historical crisis or a historical problem. It is this historical vision which unites our female writers into a singular constellation, far beyond the metaphysics of the ethnicity. And it is also this presence of historical complexities in their novels that makes them premier practitioners of this genre far exceeding their male compatriots who are novelists. If in Laretta Ngcobo, Miriam Tlali and Gladys Thomas it is the question of the hegemonic hold of the English language literary culture on the imagination of African writers, in Nadine Gordimer it is the difficulties and complexities of the impending revolution, and in Menan du Plessis and Ingrid Fiske it is the question of the viability of feminism in the context of Apartheid, where the primary struggle is against capitalism and racialism. It does not follow therefore that these writers necessarily express the same philosophy of history. What is evident is that the female imagination in the genre of the novel has a greater grasp of the complex labyrinths of our history. Here we do not encounter aimless ruminations on the metaphysics of interracial love or the disintegration of a schizoid personality or schizophrenic, when the real challenge is aimed at the capitalist order itself. The literary sensibility of our female writers has a deeper feel for historical depth and collective possibilities. Here too, like everything historical, this sensibility has its own limitations.

But there can be no doubt that it opens new ways of viewing and understanding of our literary history. For instance, the strong female sensibility in grasping the structures of the novel in South Africa, raises the question of Olive Schreiner's imprintation on this genre. Is it because of her strong beliefs in socialism and

feminism that has made the novel within our national context not easily evade the pull of various historical forces. This differentiation between our female writers and male writers in relation should not be taken too far, for Turbott Wolfe shows the limitations of such a contrast.

Before bringing this presentation to a close, we would like to say a few words about the Sophiatown Renaissance, probably the most important and most original literary school in our literary history. In last year's presentation here in Bad Boll we noted the significance of the Voorslag and Sestigers literary schools in our historical literary imaginations. In contrast with both these movements, the Sophiatown Renaissance opens a multiplicity of vision on the cultural richness of our literary history. Nationally, the Sophiatown Renaissance has been usually understood to have been only an extraordinary flowering of literary creativity among Africans in the 1950s. But two books of photographs, *The Fifties People of South Africa* and *The Finest Photos From the Old Drum*, both published in South Africa last year and edited and compiled by Jurgen Schadeberg, show that this cultural renaissance gave rise to perhaps the first school of photography in South Africa. This cultural effervescence also extended into painting. In other words, the Sophiatown Renaissance had deeper historical roots and a broader cultural vision than any other cultural movement in this century. It was not a cultural phenomenon isolated only to a particular race or insulated within a singular ethnic group; it extended its cultural coordinates to embrace other nationalities: embracing Indians and the so-called Coloreds (today, the other blacks): for instance, the photography of Lionel Oostendorp during this cultural moment is on par with that of Peter Magubane. The destruction of the Sophiatown Renaissance by the Apartheid State was indeed a great cultural crime. It is incumbent upon us generations who follow after to situate the Sophiatown Renaissance back in its premier position where it belongs in this century. On this issue, there can be no compromise or even discussion. Within the context of the African continent, retrospectively, the Sophiatown Renaissance is historically related to the Nigerian literary movement of the 1950s (consisting of Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, and others), in that both of them were an attempted to establish African National Literatures in the European languages. The meeting of both these literary schools in the *Transition* and *Black Orpheus* magazines through the mediation of Ezekiel Mphahlele was not accidental. The historical impossibility of establishing African national literatures in the European languages is made clear by the historical example of Ngugi wa Thiongo. Ngugi is the historical representation of the triumph of the African Marxism of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral and the failure of the attempt to establish African national literatures in the European languages: hence, his new historical position of writing African national literatures in the African languages. Within a pan-Africanist perspective, again through the intervention of Ezekiel Mphahlele, the Sophiatown Renaissance sought a cultural

identification with the Harlem Renaissance sought a cultural identification with the Harlem Renaissance which had taken place thirty-years earlier: the fascinating friendship between Langston Hughes and Ezekiel Mphahlele has still to be examined. It is all these three interrelated horizons which make the Sophiatown Renaissance one of the highest moments of our cultural expression as South Africans. A conceptual structure of our literary history without this cultural summit would be totally impoverished.

1) Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* , Verso, London, 1983, p. 25; Edward W. Said, *The World, The Text, and the Critic* , Faber and Faber, London, 1984, p. 23.

) Fredric Jameson, "The state of the subject (III)", in *Critical Quarterly* , vol. 29, no. 4, Winter 1987, pp. 16-25.

) Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe, "Raymond Williams 1921-1988", in *Critical Quarterly* , vol. 30 no. 1, Spring 1988, p. 3: "The death of Raymond Williams was a great loss for both the British and the European Left."

) Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* , Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1983 (1976), p. 185-186.

) Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* , Oxford University Press, London, 1977, p. 121-122.

) A special issue of *TriQuarterly* no. 69 (From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art), Spring-Summer 1987, (eds.) David Bunn and Jane Taylor.

) Ralph Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the founding of White South Africa* , Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985, p. 212-213.

) Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* , Faber and Faber, London, 1984, p. 353.

) Keyan Tomaselli, "Introduction", *Rethinking Culture* , (ed.) Keyan Tomaselli, Anthropos Publishers, Bellville, 1988, p. 8.

) Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S.'Dumo Hlatshwayo and Nise Malange, *Black Mamba Rising: Izimbongi Zabasebenzi Emzabalazweni Wase-South Africa* , "Isingeniso" by Ari Sitas, Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, Durban, 1986.

) Herbert M. Mnguni and the present author are preparing an essay on Black Mamba Rising . The presence of Alfred Temba Qabula at the Second Bad Boll (West Gemany) South AFrican Literature Conference in late 1987 was a serious historical moment. His presence amongst us Exiles was a clear indication that our forced long march through the European languages cannot be used as a pretext or excuse for not going back to our mother-languages (African languages). The similarities between his project (and his Comrades) and that of Ngugi wa Thiong'o is clear. Also meeting Don Mattera at the First Bad Boll South African Literature Conference in 1986 was a momentous occasion. For this, Robert Kriger, our compatriot scholar and organizer of these Conferences, cannot be highly praised.

) See the essay, "Historical Problematics in Black South African Literature"; to be published in a book of essays on African Literatures presently being assembled by Professor Mbulelo Mzamane at the University of Atlanta.

) cf., "The Moments of `Voorslag' and `Sestigers' in our Literary History", in South African Literature: From Popula Culture to the Written Artifact , (eds.) Robert Kriger and Wolfgang Schafer, Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, Bad Boll (West Germany), 1988, p. 93-102.

) cf., "South African Photography in the Literary Era of the Sophiatown Renaissance", to appear in a journal on the history of photography, Fotogesichte (Frankfurt), sometime in 1989.

) This is one of the reasons that Ezekiel Mphahlele is one of the crucial figures in our contemporary cultural history: to reject him would be to reject glorious decades of our cultural history.

) cf., "The Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois (1863-1963): From Aime Cesaire to Steve Biko", to appear in the Pan-Africanist magazine, Africa and the World (London), in 1989. The essay was written for the twenty-five anniversary commemoration of the passing away of Du Bois in Ghana on August 27, 1963 (August 27, 1988).

) cf., "The Passion of Literary Theory in Contemporary Black America: An African Perspective", to appear in a forthcoming issue of Presence Africane (Paris). This essay is a response to the brilliant constellation of black America literary critics like Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who are changing the cultural structure and shape of Afro-American and American literary history. It is also a response to the cultural map of the literary contours of modernism and postmodernism they have effected in the black world.