

Ancient Kemet in African American Literature and Criticism, 1853 to the Present

by

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Abstract

Though infrequently acknowledged, anteriority informs the development of the African American literary tradition because African American thinkers studied the ancient African record for inspiration as they consciously instigated Africana creative production since the nineteenth century. It is a limited contemporary notion to credit Afrocentricity, alone, for featuring the record of Ancient Kemet achievement as a catalyst for advancing African agency. Based on this legacy, Afrocentric literary criticism advances a corrective that includes the early history and adds new applications of African-centered cosmology to African American literary analysis.

The Kemet heritage penetrates the literature, the orature, the pottery, the burial rituals, the procreative myths, and the modes of thought of Africa. It is the classical African civilizations themselves that have given us so much organic contact with the history of ideas. The vivid example of the massive memorials to African genius, Karnak, the temples of the Valley of the Kings, the major shrines. When we feel, even now, the rhythms of creation in dance, art, literature, music, and talk the African intimacy with nature and fullness with life, we are experiencing our own standards, values, and codes exhibited in our approach to

life thousands of years later. The festivals, the color, the vibrancy, the appeal to the deities, the incessant discussion, the dance, movement, show us ourselves dancing with the gods along the banks of the Nile.

--Molefi Kete Asante¹

Introduction

As a matter of methodology in Africana literary criticism, *anteriority*—an awareness of the continuum from ancient to modern origins and historical developments—informs the practices, procedures, guidelines, and techniques for the development of the literary tradition. It is to *anteriority* that African American thinkers turned to for guidance, inspiration, and models, whether concise or romanticized, as they consciously instigated Africana creative production since the nineteenth century. It is a limited contemporary notion to credit Afrocentricity, alone, for prioritizing the record of Ancient Kemetic achievement as a catalyst for advancing African agency. Instead, the approaches African American forebears managed in the processes of engraving a new identity on American soil are examples of African-centered creativity, often pursued under conditions of socio-political duress. There is a hearty tradition of African Americans thinkers who surveyed the broad African past to excavate its cultural and historical record for their generation’s contribution to “beginning again.”² African American thinkers responsible for non-fiction and fiction literatures as well as groundbreaking literary and cultural movements summoned and sampled the ancient Kemetic aesthetic over a century before Molefi Kete Asante institutionalized the legacy of their intellectual activity as Afrocentricity. Reinstating this legacy into the record of African American literary criticism is both a *corrective* that fine-tunes the role of early and continuing Afrocentric behavior in the literary tradition and a *map* that demonstrates the methodological possibilities of advancing a literary tradition as representatives of a “nation within a nation.”

The first part of this essay is a survey of how the corrective and the map offer guidelines for launching literary movements, for excavating tools (such as ritual and pageantry) for framing practices of genre (particularly in African American *theatre*), and for the unfinished business of embracing Kemet as an *African* past with usable cosmologies, archetypes, and structures that hold promise for literary productivity of future generations. The latter part of this essay introduces a notable cadre of recent scholarship that offers unprecedented and visionary re-/interpretations of how Kemet and cosmology function in the discipline’s literary record. Some of the current literary applications layer diverse African-derived cosmologies, which can range from Kemetic, Bantu-Congo, Yoruba, and so forth, but most feature Afrocentric discussions of Kemetic conceptualizations of literature. Collectively, the literary models and practices highlighted in this essay are central aspects of an emergent Afrocentric literary criticism.

Afrocentricity, the liberating African-centered orientation to phenomena that prioritizes people of African descent as subjects of their experiences, has provided useful tools for location,

methodology, and directives for innovation to advance Africana literary study and analysis. The proof is in the diverse strategies, interpretations, and models that have been applied to literary analysis since the early 1980s when configurations of Afrocentricity began to appear in print. The revised approaches to orientation negate the insightful critical approaches of neither the past nor the present. Instead, they layer humanistic points of information, often corrective or revisionist, over traditional analyses in order to better situate the role and meaning of culture—worldview, logic, antecedent, function, and vision—found in creative scenarios imagined by writers of African descent. This is an effort toward a thorough, discursive essay—a forthright and candid narrative—that weaves a web of literary history and methodological developments to firmly address the ways scholars are utilizing and operationalizing Kemet and Afrocentricity in literary criticism.

The canon of critical perspectives on anteriority, or the significance of the Kemet classical model, in the archive of the African American literary tradition, is a key beginning feature of any discussion of Afrocentric literary criticism and its tradition. It has the potential to advance an Afrocentric structure in Africana literary pedagogy as practitioners fear not the question of “Where is ancient Kemet in African American literary criticism and history?” The answer lies in both non-fiction and fiction forms of the tradition and demonstrates the vast possibilities of the influence of philosophy, ethical and moral thought, structure, and theme invoked by the oldest African sources as models. The forefathers and foremothers of the radical Black intellectual tradition knew of its achievements two centuries ago when African American literature’s content relied mostly on non-fiction elements such as the formal essay and largely semi-autobiographical trends such as the ex-enslavement narrative.

Martin Delany’s essay on ancient Kemet’s legacy, “Origins and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry,”³ which scholars view as a seminal speech-essay in his career that served as a crucial start of his literary and political career, appears in 1853—the same year William Wells Brown published the first African American novel, *Clotel*.⁴ He writes, “Being a people of a high order of intellect, and subject to erudite and profound thought, the Egyptians and Ethiopians were the first who came to the conclusion that man was created in the similitude of God”.⁵ Delany transcribed his knowledge of Egypt during the enslavement period when it was a crime in many states for Africans to read and write, thus his non-fiction engagements of Kemet are part of the canon representing Kemet in the African American literary tradition.

Scholars who contributed to what we now regard as the Negro Studies movement, featured histories of ancient African traditions as early as the antebellum period⁶ so that by 1983 when Harold Cruse reminded agents of institutionalized Black Studies to create “original fiction and drama depicting ancient Antiquity” that draws on “the fictional recreation of everything William Leo Hansberry or Chancellor Williams ever contrived to put in print,” knowledge of the ancient Kemet legacy was pervasive, even in a general form.⁷ Hansberry was born in 1894 and Williams in 1898. Hansberry’s youth was a quest to find mentors and sources that corroborated

Africa's ancient role in world civilizations, and by 1922 when he taught his first three courses on topics of African anteriority at Howard University, he had become a national critical voice on African anteriority. Williams' work, though not published until 1971 as *The Destruction of Black Civilization*⁸, is the culmination of teaching and administering grade school in the 1930s, researching Africa in the 1950s, and teaching at Howard University from the 1980s until his death. Thus, the historical research essay and ancient African historical studies play a major part in Black public consciousness of an historical race pride. Awareness of the transmission of African history is also a key element that infuses African American literary content and timelines with a continuity of African ideas in creative production.

African American literature is a testament of how people of African descent have and continue to translate the culture's identity, experiences, communal aspirations, challenges, and hopes into a creative narrative. Writers have summoned the evidence of survival, intellectual activity, and productivity of ancient Kemet, in both general and specific terms, as cultural defense and as a means for advancing wholeness for Africans in America. These are understated references to the sustaining pride and cultural instinct of Africans in America, and anteriority's subtle appearance in literary texts is meaningful to the Afrocentric literary critic or reader. Without much ado, yet with visceral cultural testament, writers infuse their narratives with passing, yet indisputable references that indicate the value (even if characters do not yet realize it) of anteriority in their worldviews. The analysis would benefit greatly if we could discover morsels from the archives that reveal the philosophy and thinking behind these writers' casual references to Kemet and anterior worldviews. In *Invisible Man* (1947) Ralph Ellison's protagonist observes the destitution of an elderly evicted couple, noting:

Yes, these old folks had a dream book, but the pages went blank and it failed to give them the number. It was called the Seeing Eye, The Great Constitutional Dream Book, The Secrets of Africa, The Wisdom of Ancient Egypt—but the eye was blind, it lost its luster. It's all cataracted like a cross-eyed carpenter and it doesn't saw straight. All we have is the Bible and this Law here rules that out. So, where do we go? Where do we go from here, without a pot--?⁹

Ellison signifies on the divine things African Americans have lost through their sojourns. Next, as a general literary reference informed by African-centered historical consciousness, anteriority appears in Louis Peterson's 1953 landmark play *Take a Giant Step*.¹⁰ The play is semi-autobiographical, and Peterson, a Morehouse graduate, confirms that his parents prioritized his education as a response to helping him understand "what am I going to do about the fact that I am a Negro in this civilization."¹¹ When a white high school teacher mocks and dismisses the agency of Africans enslaved in America, the protagonist Spence reacts saying, "when she got through talking they sounded like the worst morons that ever lived and I began to wonder how they'd managed to live a few thousand years all by themselves in Africa with nobody's help."¹² Even amidst recent (2008) re-evaluations of Peterson's work, critics still ignore the direct

reference to African anteriority while featuring only the insult to the enslaved.¹³ A third example of the subtle references to anteriority is James Baldwin's play *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1963) in which he addresses the ancient record before Christianity and laments the loss of ancient African cosmologies related to immortalization:

MERIDIEN: I'm a Christian. I've been a Christian all my life, like my Mama and my Daddy before me and like their Mama and Daddy before them. Of course, if you go back far enough, you get to a point *before* Christ, if you see what I mean, B.C.—and at that point, I've been thinking, black people weren't raised to turn the other cheek, and in the hope of heaven. No, they didn't have to take low. Before Christ. They walked around just as good as anybody else, and when they died, they didn't go to heaven, they went to join their ancestors. My son's dead, but he's not gone to join the ancestors.¹⁴

As both Kemetic and cosmological inquiries, two of the three literary samples of subtle ancient reference address the question of the seeming paradox between Western religion and race.

Literary movements (e.g. Garveyism, New Negro, Black Arts/Aesthetic) have best defined the relationship between the ancient African heritage and African American literature, but generations' references to anteriority have shifted back and forth from the specific to the general. Kemet's importance resurfaced in the cultural kaleidoscoping of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro movement through the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, particularly through the critics' interest in pageants and ritual. The Black Arts and Black Aesthetic Movement writers summon an awareness of the cultural continuum with their high regard for ancient culture but in mostly general and rhetorical references. A handful of writers synthesize 1960s and 1970s cultural fervor and anti-white-supremacy with reminders of a broadly understood ancient cosmology. Harold Cruse is a voice in the Black Studies movement in the early 1980s reminding us to continue to look to the ancient past for *literary* inspiration, which corresponds to the high research and scholarship activity in culturally and socio-politically advancing the meaning of ancient Kemet to the Black Studies movement. The theatre practitioners traditionally and in the contemporary era have had the most informed vision of what ancient Kemet has to offer. James Hatch describes this process, noting, "In the American theatre, African seeds took root. Some produced great vibrant blossoms, visible, self-conscious imports."¹⁵ And amidst generational waves of creativity, some writers simply generically compare ancient African customs and worldviews with the Eurocentric or contrive broadly-defined ancient settings.

Kemet in Literary Movements and Theater Philosophy

W. E. B. Du Bois summons Kemet in his 1911 pageant *Star of Ethiopia* describing Africa's gifts to the world, namely the "Gift of civilization in the dark and splendid valley of the Nile."¹⁶ The pageant is also a non-fiction form of literature as it relies on the spectacle (creative visual embellishment) to initiate African-derived ritual in order to reinforce African pillars of the African American heritage in a time and place that regularly contested African agency. Du Bois specifies his awareness of how the ancient traditions should frame the modern and contemporary. He writes, "We should resurrect forgotten ancient Negro art and history and we should set the black man before the world as both a creative artist and a strong subject for artistic treatment."¹⁷ Du Bois offers this over a decade before using his editorial position with *The Crisis* magazine to encourage the New Negro movement.

Written in 1911, *The Star of Ethiopia* was performed in 1913 to commemorate the fiftieth-year anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, and in the second episode, Du Bois summons a version of ancient Kemet with the call, "Hear ye, year ye! All of them that come to know the Truth, and listen to the tale of the wisest and gentlest of the races of men whose faces be Black. Hear ye, hear ye, of the Second Gift of Black men to this world, the Gift of civilization in the dark and splendid valley of the Nile. Men of the world, keep silence and hear ye this." The pageant introduces the "Gift of the Nile" as the "Second Gift of the Negro to the world," and the image Du Bois attempts to evoke promotes the value of the African ancient record (excusing his metaphorical use of the word "savages"):

There comes a strain of might music, dim in the distance and drawing nearer. The 100 savages [sic] thronged round the whole Court rise and stand listening. Slowly there come fifty veiled figures and with them come the Sphinx, Pyramid, the Obelisk and the empty Throne of the Pharaoh drawn by oxen. As the cavalcade passes, the savages, wondering, threatening, inquiring, file by it. Suddenly a Black chieftain appears in the entrance, with the Uraeus in one hand and the winged Beetle in the other. The Egyptians unveil the throne and the cavalcade, led by posturing dancers and Ra, and followed by Egyptians and savages, pass in procession around to the right to the thunder of music and tomtoms. As they pass, Ra is crowned as Priest and King. While the Queen of Sheba and the Candace of Ethiopia join the procession at intervals. Slowly all pass out save fifty savages [sic], who linger examining their gifts.¹⁸

30,000 people witnessed this pageant in New York, which James Hatch describes as the "single greatest tribute to Africa" because it was a huge spectacle relying on 350 actors, an Egyptian Art Temple, and African art.¹⁹ In 1915, Du Bois reflects on this pageant and re-emphasizes the value of the ancient record, saying, "In art and literature we should try to loose the tremendous emotional wealth of the Negro and the dramatic strength of his problems through writing, the stage, pageantry, and other forms of art."²⁰

Alain Locke makes a more general reference to African traditions, and Errol Hill paraphrases this as the “African continuum in the arts of Afro-Americans.”²¹ Locke writes, “One can scarcely think of a complete development of Negro dramatic art . . . without some significant artistic re-expression of African life and the traditions associated with it.”²² He adds, “the sophisticated race sense of the Negro should lead back over the trail of the group tradition to an interest in things African, the natural affinities of the material and the art will complete the circuit and they will most electrically combine.”²³ The theatre tradition was lively during this era, and in general, African American playwrights had been probing their imagination for ways to capture more ancient African traditions in their work as early as 1898 with *Senegambian Carnival* and other works such as *Sultan of Zulu* (1900), *In Dahomey* (1902), and *Abyssinia* (1908).²⁴

The literary activity of Marcus Garvey’s *Negro World* as seedling for what bloomed into the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro movement is *specific* in its awareness of anteriority. Tony Martin’s archival research on Marcus Garvey from *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (1983) reveals layers of intellectual activity related to the possibilities of anteriority in the history of African American literary criticism.²⁵ Approaching the 1922 annual convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an editorial in *The Negro World* suggested that UNIA should commission “a Black scholar to write a comprehensive history of Black literature.”²⁶ The UNIA did not see this through, but it did appoint a committee to investigate reprinting Rufus Lewis Perry’s 1886 volume on *The Cushite, Or, The Descendants of Ham: As Found In The Writings of Ancient Historians And Poets From Noah to the Christian Era*.²⁷ Martin also mentions in his chapter on “Garveyism and Literature” that scholars and laypersons delivered papers at UNIA meetings. In July of 1920, William H. Ferris, a contributing editor to *Negro World* shared a paper on “The Negro in Prehistoric Times.”²⁸ In the chapter on “Music, Drama, Art, and Elocution,” Martin begins by reinforcing that “Literature is largely indivisible from music and the other arts. At a group level, interest in one normally influences interest in the others . . . [and] spills over into others.”²⁹ His emphasis on Professor William Isles’ (UNIA bandmaster) 1922 series on “the sources of Black music as far back as ancient Egypt” is a matter of literary history, as his thesis, in general, is to demonstrate the *Negro World*’s precursory role to the New Negro Movement. In 1924, the UNIA ladies branch sponsored the play *From Peasant to Crown Prince of Egypt*, set during the reign of King Tut-Ank-Amen, whose tomb had been found recently and was discussed liberally alongside “African origins of civilization” in *Negro World*.³⁰ The Garveyite movement has contributions that must be regarded in assessing Kemet’s place in African American literary criticism.

There is a noticeable lapse between the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro and Black Arts/Aesthetic movements, during which African Americans were busy with World War II, the Korean War, domestic activism and processes of integration, as well as anti-colonial political and activist work. Kemet’s appearance in African American literary criticism is at its highest at the juncture of a *movement*, when literary visionaries attempt to, as Dudley Randall writes,

“weigh the historical facts, note the trends, and make a prediction”³¹ and when they seek to *culturally* reconstitute what it means to be African in America. Hatch frames a similar observation, writing, “Every tide of liberation for Black American has thrown up waves of renewed interest in folk customs of African origins.”³²

In 1972, Paul Carter Harrison’s contribution to framing the African American experience within the African continuum through a merging of Black Arts/Black Aesthetic Movements ideas begins with his declaration that the Black man is “more than the sum of his Babylonian acquired parts, a force that, owing to its African cosmological orientation, its unique world view, defies sociological explanation and is growing strong, a force gaining momentum of ancestral wisdom that is determined to break the cultural mode that has locked its energies, its expressions, its authentic cultural vision of reality”³³ He offers a corrective through his critique of how whites in Europe and the United States analyzed Ira Aldridge’s theatrical skill as if he was not a product of “the vigorous models of excellence posited in the accumulative knowledge of our ancestors who raised Pyramids, carved God’s spirit out of stone.”³⁴ He also acknowledges “traces of [our] accumulative knowledge—our ancestral juju—which gives potency to our endeavors and guides us through proper relationships with forces so that we may be granted clarity of vision.”³⁵ With respect to cosmology, Harrison writes “African thought presents a system of logic which is derived from a noncontradictory cosmology.”³⁶ He explains,

African thought has not tried to force reality into fixed limits so it can be recognized as *real*. . . . Cosmic order brings things together on a basis that is nonmechanical in implication At the root of human action and interaction there must necessarily be an explanation that deals with cosmic forces. . . . The revelation of any mode comes about through an experiencing of the impact of forces cosmically arranged in such a ways that our viscera is committed to the task of restoring harmony.”³⁷

In contemporary Afrocentric terms, this is a reference to Maat, but Harrison’s work appeared in 1972, before the illuminating studies on Maat appeared. In *The Drama of Nomo* Harrison offers literary criticism and analysis of dozens of African American and even European and continental African literary works, and he aims to infuse African American theatre criticism with the standard of maintaining “cosmic unity.”³⁸

With respect to bibliography, Harrison references Cheikh Anta Diop’s *Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (1959)³⁹ as a key source on anteriority, but also relies on John Mbiti’s *African Religions and Philosophies* (1970)⁴⁰ and Janheinz Jahn’s *Muntu* (1961).⁴¹ It is from Harrison’s analysis that we should make the distinction between ancient Kemetic and post-Mbiti references to the African continuum. Mbiti has provided Africana Studies with a seminal text for religious and philosophical (including cosmological) antecedents of diverse African cultures, but the search for pre-Mbiti, African cosmological (e. g. Kemetic) referents in literary criticism prevails.

Carlton and Barbara Molette describe Mbiti as “an African theologian who is an expert at generalizing about traditional African religions in a manner that is meaningful to non-Africans. Although Dr. Mbiti’s work is not directly concerned with the retention of African culture by African Americans, his statements on the subject of traditional African religions provide an excellent basis for assessing these retentions.”⁴² Often, we have not been bold enough and/or informed enough to extend our reference to the African continuum beyond the West African (and Central African) cultures from which our enslaved African ancestors came. From *Muntu* (1961), Jahn’s discussions of Nommo (the Magic Power of the Word) and Hantu (History of Literature) have been helpful as well as Kimbwandende Fu-Kiau’s *Tying the Spiritual Knot: African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo* (1980) that illuminates Bantu cosmology and the ancient Kemetic inheritance that informs it. An additional task of finding ancient Kemet in African American literary criticism requires us to search not only pre-Mbiti but also pre-Jahn in order to have a more ancient knowledge of the African continuum. Maulana Karenga’s sources such as *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*⁴³ and a host of works by other scholars of the Kemetic tradition (e.g. Asante, Carruthers, Hilliard, Nobles, etc.) are key sources in this endeavor.

Also citing Jahn, anecdotally, James T. Stewart envisions a role for cosmology four years earlier in “The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist” (1968) from *Black Fire* when he writes,

Cosmology is that branch of physics that studies the universe. It then proceeds to make certain assumptions, and from these, construct “models.” If the model corresponds to the reality, and certain factors are predictable, then it can be presumed to substantiate the observable phenomenon in the universe. This essay is an attempt to construct a model; a particular way of looking at the world. This is necessary because existing white paradigms or models do not correspond with the realities of black existence. It is imperative that we construct models with different basic assumptions. . . . Our models must be consistent with a black style, our natural aesthetic styles, and our moral and spiritual styles. In doing so, we will be merely following the natural demands of our culture.⁴⁴

This is another example of the link between the ideas of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic movements being developed more conceptually and formally in their reappearance in the Afrocentric paradigm, which itemizes *cosmology* as a prominent indicator of the legacy of how the Ancient Kemetic model conceptualized worldview, myth, order, and cosmic consciousness.

Black Theatre: Premise and Presentation (1986, 1992) by Carlton and Barbara Molette is African American theatre history and criticism that addresses anteriority with precision. In an early chapter on “Values and Interpretation” they critique how popular European theatre historians devalue cyclical and repeated forms of Egyptian ritual in favor of Greece’s competitive trend of rapidly producing new plays each year.⁴⁵

The writers highlight the range of surviving Egyptian literature, including over fifty pyramid texts, texts chronicling the coronation of pharaohs, the Memphite Drama, and the Abydos Passion Play.⁴⁶ The Molettes note the Eurocentric debates over whether or not these texts were the “earliest recorded theatrical productions” and remind us that literature—theatre, in particular—was one of the many categories of evidence that Diop used in his research.⁴⁷ Eurocentric scholars tested theories about whether or not an Egyptian play was meant for a performance or as literature based on the artistic merit and flow when re-enacting the drama, and the Molettes respond, “In face of this evidence, the proof that theatre art existed in Egypt by 2500 B.C. and continued for at least 2000 years would seem to be substantial.”⁴⁸ They confirm the existence of a performance space and scenery at the Step Pyramid of Zoser, Sakkar in 2778 B.C. based on studies of Egyptian pyramid architecture.⁴⁹ The Molettes make one of the most significant contributions to African American literary criticism concerning Kemetic theatrical practices, and their research and analyses chronicles the effects of racism on Kemetic theatre history. They write,

As one seeks answers to questions about the origins of theatre art in Africa, an interesting pattern in Eurocentric scholarship becomes evident. This pattern is one of consistent failure to recognize information that seems to us to be obvious in establishing that theatre art reached a remarkable level of sophistication in the Nile river valley on the continent of Africa 2000 years prior to the “golden age” of Greek drama.⁵⁰

Black Theatre: Premise and Presentation offers a vibrant collection of essays on Afrocentric literary criticism on topics of Afrocentric ritual and cultural formations of space and time that have broad possibilities of application.

Early predictions of the classical role of ancient Kemetic sources in African American literary history are being partially fulfilled by contemporary Afrocentric literary criticism that prioritizes understandings of cosmology in Africana literatures. This inquiry coincides with recent intellectual stirrings and agitation that press the core curricular need for a Kemetic literature course in Africana Studies. In the larger Afrocentric enterprise, Africana literary criticism is slowly benefiting from innovative analyses and applications of the Afrocentric paradigm, namely by expanding the conversation from a focus on Kemetic *influences* in literature to a focus on the *application* of Kemetic ideas and practices in the literature, namely, how African-centered cosmological structures should be read in literary texts.

Afrocentricity, Cosmology, and Afrocentric Literary Criticism

Afrocentric cosmology frames the African conceptualization of order in the universe, or the world. It includes a vision and understanding of the general laws which govern it (e.g. Maat, ancestors, cultural self-preservation) across space and time.

Afrocentric cosmology frames our thought processes as we determine the function and relationships between belief systems, worldview, ritual, and life-sustaining myth, and is attentive to how order is culturally produced and anticipated. Thus, Africana literature, which variably offers narratives that suggest anteriority, legacy, cultural vision, resilience, problem solving, survival, universal awareness, and mastery of mental processes can be explicated to account for its full complexity with a study of Afrocentric cosmology. Recent scholarship reveals an Afrocentric shift that now frames Africana “spirituality” as a more Kemetically-inspired “cosmology,” and this shift is one example that distinguishes the literary enterprise within the discipline of Africana Studies from that of English departments.

Literary criticism is the creation, chronicling, and application of analytical frameworks and tools that are compatible with the advances, shifts, discoveries, and trends in literary subject, theme, structure, and canon formation. It permits thorough, complex, and innovative explications of stylized writing. Afrocentric literary criticism is an application of Afrocentric characteristics, general areas of inquiry, and principles of intellectual creativity to Africana literatures.⁵¹ It initiates a critical revision and amendment of literary criticism to account for the increased African-centered cultural consciousness that, based on contemporary advances in African-centered scholarship, now better informs our awareness of the Africanity at work as an influence on and determiner of individual and community behaviors that are frequently chronicled in the literary narrative. Afrocentricity, as a theoretical paradigm, has had a dynamic contemporary effect on the possibilities of Africana literary analysis because the paradigm accounts for not only a holistic revision of how we engage past, present, and future phenomena related to the life experiences of people of African descent, but it also provides highly focused analytical tools for the critique of literature. Afrocentricity introduces location theory and a prioritization of cosmological analysis, and these two emphases are additions that are now part of the canon of African American literary criticism.⁵²

Mainstream anthologies on African American literature and criticism address Afrocentricity to varying degrees, but literary scholarship confirms it as a key analytical tool for the contemporary Africana literary tradition. *African American Literary Theory* (2000), edited by Wilson Napier, has three references to “Afrocentrism,” a derogatory transliteration of Afrocentricity.⁵³ *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (1997) has an entry on Afrocentricity that reinforces the philosophical and theoretical perspectives of having a “strong emphasis on Egyptian texts, aesthetics, behavior, race, gender, and culture” particularly in application to the study of literature⁵⁴ (9), and the term is used in over twenty-five entries. In *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, the authors define Afrocentricity as not only a paradigm and orientation to data but also as a “movement” related to literature inasmuch as it is a “resurgence of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s.”⁵⁵ As a corrective that expands the scope of African American literary criticism, the earlier survey of ancient Kemet’s appearance in the African American literary tradition, primarily at the ripening of literary movements and in theater, is precursory discussion for an analysis of ancient Kemet’s contemporary evolution as an application of cosmology (per Afrocentricity).

Afrocentricity has influenced how scholars analyze and categorize traditional and recent texts, but, most importantly, it has ushered in a radical shift in how scholars interpret cosmology, namely the cultural factors and sources responsible for a text's spiritual underpinnings and negotiations of worldview. Carolyn L. Holmes applies Afrocentric theory to literature in the name of cosmology and as a significant early model in "African American Literature through an Afrocentric Paradigm." She regards the Black Arts Movement (i.e. Paul Carter Harrison's use of cosmology) as "a precursor to the Afrocentric critical approach" and cites cosmological issues among the key areas of inquiry.⁵⁶ She also applies it to the life experiences of Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin as a model for literary scholars to use in connecting author biography with spiritual elements. She writes,

Both Hurston's and Baldwin's early connections with the church were natural (or perhaps unnatural) outgrowths of their lost ancestral heritage. In this hazy realm of what Larry Neal termed their "Epic Memory," when African peoples created "civilization," gave "light" to the world, and built temples and pyramids in the Nile Valley, their spirituality would have been the common denominator of their lives. As Hilliard, Carruthers, and Karenga have demonstrated through their efforts to restore the Ancient Kemetic sacred texts, Baldwin and Hurston's life objectives would have been to become "God-like." . . . In their off-centered worlds in the African diaspora, their spiritual educations still made a very powerful impact on their cosmological views, and this was reflected in their literary works.⁵⁷

It is the Afrocentric paradigm that directs attention to assessing the place of cosmology in the lives and writings of Hurston and Baldwin. Holmes's application of the Afrocentric paradigm is dynamic as she reinterprets Baldwin's legacy, in particular. She writes, "What Larry Neal and the others did not understand (and Afrocentricity teaches us this) was that Baldwin's emphasis on morality and his constant struggle to find truth and justice were very much a part of the African tradition. These features of Baldwin's cosmology had a deeper structure and possibly an Ancient Kemetic source."⁵⁸ Holmes regards Hurston's and Baldwin's literature as "spiritual gifts" and warns, "The circle must not be broken and an Afrocentric paradigm may be used to spread the continuum into and beyond the twenty-first century."⁵⁹ Holmes' analysis is a landmark essay that demonstrates the ways the Afrocentric paradigm has inspired African literature scholars to embrace cosmology as a terminology that is more African-centered than mere discussions of spirituality in literature.

Regina Jennings, in "Toni Morrison's *Jazz*: A Jam Session in Africana Culture and Cosmology" (1999) begins her analysis by contextualizing her critical activity within Afrocentricity, and she offers an elaborate analysis of Ancient Kemetic cosmological elements that inform the novel's literary conventions and devices. Her analysis is conversant with Mdu Ntr, along with the works of Cheikh Anta Diop and Marimba Ani.⁶⁰

For the sake of comparison, two years later, Therese H. Higgins in *Religion, Cosmology, and Folklore: The African Influences in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2001) surveys the presence of African cosmological beliefs of nine African cultures, including the Abluyia of Kenya, the Lovedu of Zimbabwe, the Mende of Sierra Leone, the Tutsis and Hutus of Rwanda, and the Ashanti of Ghana in Toni Morrison's novels.⁶¹ Higgins does not contextualize her analysis as part of the Afrocentric paradigm; instead, her analysis is conversant with postmodern criticism, namely ideas on language from Nietzsche and ideas on discourse per Wittgenstein.⁶² Higgins suggests that Morrison views culture

as more than merely the customs of black people. In order to appreciate and fully understand her work, Morrison asks that her readers know the cosmology, the religiosity and the folk traditions of African Americans. But only a limited amount is learned by looking into the African American's America; much more is learned by delving into the African American's Africa, for much of the material in Morrison's fiction closely parallels African culture and cosmology.⁶³

Through an anthropological lens, she explores indigenous African cosmological beliefs and systems, but she does not project African American cosmological agency based on how the messages in Morrison's novels are functional in the process of African survival in America.

In 2001, Melvin B. Rahming offers a dynamic application of Afrocentric cosmology to literature, responding to critics who claim African American men's narratives lack spiritual history, in his essay "Without a Cosmology: The Psychospiritual Condition of African American Men in Brent Wade's *Company Man* and Melvin Dixon's *Trouble the Water*" (2001).⁶⁴ Rahming interprets a problematic in earlier timelines chronicling African American men's spirituality because of the lack of "identification of Kemetic cosmological tenets, which were the basis of a unified civilization and a fully achieved understanding of the essential harmony and potential oneness of human and cosmic consciousness."⁶⁵ Rahming is concerned with how the absence of spirituality in African American literary characters signifies "the loss of the cosmological map from which a culture gets the bearings . . . for its spirit."⁶⁶

Rahming relies on theories of cosmology and spirit from Wade W. Nobles, Marimba Ani and other Afrocentric theorists such as Naim Akbar, Gale Jackson, Cedric X, and Joseph Baldwin and supports his approach explaining, "Because, of all the contemporary critical models, Afrocentricity is the only one that privileges the spirit-centered cosmology of ancient Africa in its theoretical constructs; because, consequently, it seeks to return consciousness to its cosmological nexus; because, furthermore, it recognizes that [as Asante says] 'as a people, our most cherished and most valuable achievements are the achievements of spirit.'"⁶⁷ In 2001, Rahming observes that Afrocentric literary criticism is still in its "nascent" stage and "can be expected to continue its methodological development . . . Meanwhile, the virtual absence of Afrocentric literary analyses from contemporary critical discourse constitutes a spiritual handicap, especially to members of the African Diaspora."⁶⁸

The problematic that Rahming poses in his final observation is what this essay aims to correct. Asante's work in formalizing the Afrocentric paradigm as well as the compatible peer advances, particularly the possibilities of applying cosmological considerations, are significant contributions to Africana literature criticism. The Afrocentric theoretical models advance Kemet's influence in African American literary criticism in both general and specific contexts, and this is a continuation of the early twentieth century acknowledgments of the legacy of Kemet in African American life and literary criticism.

Canon Formation

As we construct a bibliography toward canon formation that verifies the impact of Afrocentric literary criticism, its prioritization of cosmology, and the need for the discipline to regularly offer a course on ancient Kemetic literature, there are several additional, notable works, including dissertations, that support this effort. The task is to excavate writings from as far back in the African American rhetorical and literary traditions as possible, including, but not limited to the account of Delany's speech "Africa and the African Race," (1860) which is a public address he delivered throughout Britain in which he compared Egyptian culture and motifs to African practices among the people he visited in Central Africa⁶⁹ and his 1878 *Principia of Ethnology: The Origins of Races and Color, with Archeological Compendium of Ethiopia and Egyptian Civilization* whose Chapter XIV is on "Wisdom of Ethiopia and Egypt."⁷⁰ Karenga's *Selections from the Husia* (1984) is important because it is a "selection and retranslation of the oldest sacred text in the world, with critical commentaries on the richness of the African spiritual achievement and legacy in ancient Egypt" such as "the earliest written record of the dawning of humanity's structured consciousness concerning spirituality and ethics."⁷¹ Karenga excerpts one of the selections—"In Praise of the Scribe"—as introduction to the section on literature in *Introduction to Black Studies* (2010).⁷² Karenga contributes to the awareness of Kemet's role in Africana literary criticism with his opening statement on anteriority, noting, "Black literature is the oldest literature in the world and appears in ancient Egypt in the Nile Valley at least 5000 years ago."⁷³

Ian Smart's *Amazing Connections: Kemet to Hispanophone Africana Literature* (1996) advances Kemetic origins of Western, Hispanic, and Afro-Hispanic cultures.⁷⁴ Clinton Crawford's "The Multiple Dimensions of Nubian/Egyptian Rhetoric and Its Implications for Contemporary Classroom Instructions" from *African American Rhetorics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2004) offers suggestions for pedagogy, including grounding the moral character of students through emphasizing cosmology in the curriculum.⁷⁵ Also with respect to pedagogy, Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie's "ASR Rising: Using Classical Literature to Revitalize First-Year Composition" (1998) has some innovative approaches to incorporating Kemetic ideas in instructional writing models.⁷⁶ Gregory E. Rutledge addresses "transpositional cosmology" in the works of science/speculative fiction or futuristic writer—Samuel R. Delany—and his analyses rely partly on Afrocentric work that Nilgun Anadolu-Okor has done on Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, and Charles Fuller.

Aldon Lynn Nielson contributes an innovative and clarifying look at early and contemporary “black efforts to reassert African inscription as a basis for metaphysical philosophy in language” in “The Calligraphy of Black Chant: Resiting African American Poetries.”⁷⁷ Nielson’s essay is a literary history corrective that redirects attention to the role of script and the graphic tradition from Delany’s recording of Egyptian hieroglyphics to present innovation in African American poetry. A critical anthology, *Literary Spaces: Introduction to Comparative Black Literature*, offers “Suggestions for an African-centered Literary Criticism” that urges the use of Afrocentric cosmology and worldview psychology in analyses of characterization.⁷⁸ Jacqueline Wigfall’s dissertation on *Kemetic Character(s) in African, Caribbean, and American Novels* (2003) has informative chapters on “Grounding Twentieth-century Narrative Revisions of Kemetic Archetypes” and “Kemet, Vernacular Methodology, and African Critical Imperative.”⁷⁹ *Sdm mdw pn m wrt m3’t: A Classical Kemetic Foundation for the Study of African Oratory* (1997) by Cynthia L. Lehman offers advances in classical rhetorical theory.⁸⁰

With respect to literary content that forms a canon of Kemet-referencing creative literatures, the following sources are suitable for a curriculum on Ancient Egyptian literature and influences. Poet Askia M. Touré studied Nile Valley civilizations with Asa Hilliard, Ivan Van Sertima and others to produce Afrocentric work that features the significance of Kemet, Diop, and other key figures and icons of anteriority.⁸¹ Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Osiris Rising* (1995) and the large body of Afrocentric criticism that responded to this vibrant novel introduce Pan-Africanism possibilities of how Kemet is meaningful to Africans at home and abroad.⁸² Gregory Walker’s novel series *Shades of Memnon* (1999-2005)⁸³, based on a ten year study of the legend of a Kushite warrior, as well as A. R. Bey’s teen literature series, *Netherworld of Kemet* (2008, 2010)⁸⁴, also fits in this category for diverse academic and popular audiences.

Application and Future Directions

This analysis should be juxtaposed against a review of course offerings in the discipline, for a general survey suggests that Africana Studies departments have not yet fully implemented these advances and perspectives on the canon of Afrocentric literature and criticism into the curriculum. Mainstream Egyptology and Ancient Studies departments list the most regular course offerings on ancient literature, and with respect to content, cross-listing and permitting such courses to be counted toward Africana Studies degrees could be a fruitful possibility in the interim. Ideally, however, the content would be best framed in an Africana Studies context. A high familiarity with the *African* version of human experience, whether studied, lived, or a synthesis of both, invigorates the possibilities of properly interpreting the myriad of cultural meaning embodied in the culture’s literatures. Seasoned scholars engage and teach the literatures from diverse and thorough critical perspectives, but for emerging scholars in Africana literary studies—scholars who have had the contemporary benefit of earning degrees in Africana Studies departments—having a usable template for a comprehensive pedagogical approach to featuring the ancient record, even in the literary tradition, is vital.

The literary *tradition* is a wellspring of material that embodies a continuous vision of African-derived experiences, and it is an extraordinary tool of cultural memory and creativity that is a catalyst from which to engage the continuum of the Africana experience. *Continuity* is a pedagogical key concept in the teaching of Africana literatures. It is a notion of practice and application wherein the intersection of the literary and historical records reciprocates meaning, values, and possibilities.

Notes

¹ Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992), 47-48.

² Description of post-1619 life for Africans in American, coined by Molefi Kete Asante in *Afrocentricity* (Trenton: African World Press, 1981).

³ Martin Delany, "The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States, and Legitimacy among Colored Men" in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 49-67.

⁴ William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or The President's Daughter*, 1853 (Armond, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

⁵ Delany, "Freemasonry," 53.

⁶ Daryl Zizwe Poe, "Black Studies in the Historically Black Colleges and Universities," in *Handbook of Black Studies*, eds. Molefi Kete Asante and Maulana Karenga (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 204-224.

⁷ Harold Cruse, "Contemporary Challenges to Black Studies," *The Black Scholar* (1984): 42.

⁸ Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A. D.* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1976).

⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1947 (New York: Vintage, 1989) 279-80.

¹⁰ Louis Peterson, *Take A Giant Step* (New York: Samuel French, 1952).

¹¹ Seymour Peck, "The Man Who Took a Giant Step," *New York Times* (1953), X1.

¹² *Ibid*, 14.

¹³ Melinda D. Wilson, "Take A Giant Step Into (African) American Theatre History: Broadway's First "Universal" Drama," *Journal of American Drama* 20.3 (2008): 49-73, 103.

¹⁴ James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 1963 (New York: Vintage, 1995), 38.

¹⁵ James Hatch, "Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre" in *Theatre of Black Americans* (New York, Applause, 1987), 13.

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- ¹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Star of Ethiopia* (W. E. B. Du Bois, 1911).
- ¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* (1915): 312. (qtd. in Errol Hill, Introduction to *Theater of Black Americans* (New York: Applause, 1987), 3.
- ¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Star of Ethiopia* (W. E. B. Du Bois, 1911).
- ¹⁹ James Hatch, "Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre," in *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Errol Hill (New York: Applause, 1987), 15.
- ²⁰ Du Bois, *Crisis*, 312.
- ²¹ Errol Hill, Introduction to *The Theatre of Black Americans* (New York: Applause, 1987), 5.
- ²² Alain Locke, "The Negro and the American Stage," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 10 (1926): 119 (qtd. in Errol Hill, Introduction to *Theater of Black Americans* (New York: Applause, 1987), 3.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ These obscure plays are referenced in James Hatch, "Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre" in *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Errol Hill (New York: Applause, 1987).
- ²⁵ Tony Martin, *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1983).
- ²⁶ Ibid., 30.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 31.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 33.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 106.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 113.
- ³¹ Dudley Randall, "The Black Aesthetic in the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City, NJ: Anchor), 221.
- ³² Hatch, "African Influences," 13.
- ³³ Paul Carter Harrison, *The Drama of Nommo* (New York: Grove Press, 1972), xi.
- ³⁴ Ibid., xii.
- ³⁵ Ibid., xiii.
- ³⁶ Ibid., xix.

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- ³⁷ Ibid., 208.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 230.
- ³⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959).
- ⁴⁰ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1970).
- ⁴¹ Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*, 1961 (New York: Grove Weindenfeld, 1989).
- ⁴² Carlton J. Molette and Barbara Molette, *Black Theatre: Premise and Presentation*, 1986 (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall, 1992), 131.
- ⁴³ Maulana Karenga, *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2006).
- ⁴⁴ James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, eds. Le Roi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 3.
- ⁴⁵ Molette and Molette, 39-40.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 41.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 41, 44.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 47.
- ⁵¹ These categories are part of the general lexicon of Afrocentricity as defined by Molefi Kete Asante.
- ⁵² Molefi Kete Asante, "Locating a Text: Implications of Afrocentric Theory," in *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination*, ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992).
- ⁵³ Marlon B. Ross, "Some Glances at the Black Flag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
- ⁵⁴ Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity," in *Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, eds. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (New York: Oxford, 1997), 9.
- ⁵⁵ Patricia Liggins Hill, et al., *Call And Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 1351.
- ⁵⁶ Carolyn L. Holmes, "Reassessing African American Literature through an Afrocentric Paradigm: Zora N. Hurston and James Baldwin," in *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination*, ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 48-49.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁰ Regina Jennings, "Toni Morrison's Jazz: A Jam Session in African Culture and Cosmology," in *Africana History, Culture, and Social Policy*, eds. James L. Conyers and Alva Barnett (New York: International Scholars Publications, 1999).

⁶¹ Therese H. Higgins, *Religion, Cosmology, and Folklore: The African Influences in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁶² Ibid., vii.

⁶³ Ibid., ix.

⁶⁴ Melvin Rahming, "Without a Cosmology: The Psychospiritual Condition of African American Men in Brent Wade's *Company Man* and Melvin Dixon's *Trouble the Water*, in *Contemporary Black Men's Fiction and Drama*, ed. Keith Clark (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 159-60.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁹ The Daily Chronicle and Northern Counties Advertiser, "Africa and the African Race" [a journalistic account of Martin R. Delany's speech "Africa and the African Race"], 1861, in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 363.

⁷⁰ Martin R. Delany, "Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization, from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry," in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 479.

⁷¹ Maulana Karenga, *Selections from the Husia: Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt*, (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1984). Description is from book description at http://www.amazon.com/Selections-Husia-Sacred-Wisdom-Ancient/dp/0943412064/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1322694020&sr=8-2 (November 30, 2011).

⁷² Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*(Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press,2010), 380.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ian Smart, *Amazing Connections: Kemet to Hispanophone Africana Literature* (Washington, DC: Original World Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ Clinton Crawford, "The Multiple Dimensions of Nubian/Egyptian Rhetoric and Its Implications for Contemporary Classroom Instruction," in *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald Jackson (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 133.

⁷⁶ Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie, "ASR Rising: Using Classical Literature to Revitalize First-Year Composition," *Transformations* (1998): 156.

⁷⁷ Aldon Lynn Nielsen, "The Calligraphy of Black Chant: Resiting African American Poetries," in *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*, ed. Joanne V. Gabbin (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 189-190.

⁷⁸ Christel N. Temple, *Literary Spaces: Introduction to Comparative Black Literature* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 50-51.

⁷⁹ Jacqueline Wigfall, "Kemet Character(s) in African, Caribbean, and American Novels," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003).

⁸⁰ Cynthia Lehman, "Sdm mdw pn m wrt m3't: A Classical Kemet Foundation for the Study of African Oratory," (PhD diss., Temple University, 1997).

⁸¹ See works by Askia Touré, including *From the Pyramids to the Projects: Poems of Genocided and Resistance* (Trenton: African World Press, 1988), *Dawson! The Epic Memory of Askia Touré* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1999), and *African Affirmations: A Song of Patriots* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008).

⁸² Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising* (Pompenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 1995).

⁸³ Gregory Walker, *Shades of Memnon* (Seker Nefer, 1998).

⁸⁴ A. R. Bey, *The Netherworld of Kemet: Ezra's Trial of Faith* (Bloomington, IL: Xlibris, 2008) and A. R. Bey, *The Netherworld of Kemet: Kismet's Ray of Hope* (Bloomington, IL: Xlibris, 2010).

Most literary criticism today, under the sign of theory, is obscure and incomprehensible, and shies from presenting daring new ways to look at literature--when it engages with contemporary literature at all. Kenneth W. Warren's book is an example of a book of literary criticism in elegant prose, completely accessible and jargon-free, yet making a sophisticated argument about a whole branch of literature, connecting politics and literature in a most exciting way. Anis Shivani, Huffington Post. Read more. Warren's research eloquently presents how and why African American Literature has come to an end. African American Lit is examined as a historic organization of African American writings based on the mission and identity of the black experience during the Jim Crow era. African American scientists, like these 31 examples, have helped 'push the envelope' of science and human understanding. She was also the first African American to ever complete a residency in Ophthalmology in 1973. Patricia also became the first female faculty member at the Department of Ophthalmology at UCLA's Jules Stein Eye Institute. She would also establish the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness in 1976. This interest was cemented by an early present of a Chemistry set by her parents. After graduating from University she would go on to lead a fruitful career in ophthalmology with the 'cherry on top' being her invention of the Laserphaco Probe - making her the first African American female medical professional to earn a medical patent.

2. Harold Amos. A brief history of African-American literature and criticism is undertaken, and the relationship of both to feminist theory is explicated. The problems in cultural and identity studies of essentialism, the identity queue, expropriation, and biology are surveyed, with particular attention paid to the work of Michael Cooke and Morrison's reading of Huckleberry Finn. Now the role of Henry Louis Gates in African-American criticism is, it seems to me, exemplary, although there are some rather harsh moments in this essay, moments that I wish to take up, that would suggest an element of "what shall I say?" extremism or overkill in Gates's thinking. This is actually not at all the persona that he has projected.