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PREFACE

Third year university students majoring in English philology take a course in American literature which includes both theoretical classes and practical seminars. Therefore this teaching aid is first meant for them as well as other English learners who are interested in American culture and literature. The African-American literary tradition is an integral part of the course, therefore, the textbook has been devised as a helpful theoretical and practical aid for studying and understanding African-American literature as the indispensable part of the mainstream American literature.

The teaching aid does not aim at providing the rich, variegated body of African-American writings in all literary genres, nor does the space provided allow one to include and explore in greater detail the work of a number of outstanding African-American authors.

The textbook focuses mainly on the most conspicuous African-American literary trends and movements: the tradition of slave narratives, the Harlem Renaissance, the period of ethnic consciousness which encompassed the Civil Rights Movement, Movements of Black Arts and Black Power, the postmodern moment in African-American literature and neo-slave narratives. The major literary trends and movements as well as their main and influential representatives and their works are introduced in their historical and cultural contexts. One more chapter is on the contemporary African-American women writers with a focus on Toni Morrison‘s literary work.

Each historical, cultural, and literary stage examined in the textbook is followed by tasks and questions which reflect their essential characteristics and indicate what things should be considered, as well as allow students to stimulate thought and discussions. Further readings are also suggested. The added Glossary helps students understand some basic notions and literary terms related to Black American studies.

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Daina Miniotaitė

INTRODUCTION

The African-American literary tradition implies the fact that African-American culture is the culture of suppressed people. The history of African-American people is marked with slavery (1619-1865) which is characterized by continuous dehumanization, humiliation, racial segregation, and exploitation. African-Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America. For centuries Europeans and Americans advanced racial theories of inferiority, which ascribed African-Americans to the lower species and ignored their ownership of cultural, ethic, and linguistic values. In an interview, one of the leading contemporary African-American authors, Toni Morrison states that prejudice and racism against African-Americans has had two purposes: it has been a distraction against recognizing the unfair class differences in the country, and it has united as Americans all other immigrants, who can claim to be white and therefore part of the mainstream simply because they are not black (Morrison, 2008, 53). However, according to Morrison, America would not be what it is without the presence of blacks. The writer believes that America was "incoherent" without the inclusion of African-Americans' contributions to the forming of the nation, its history, language, literature, and culture (Christian, 2000, 75). She presents a similar view in her book of essays on the presence of blackness in American literature *Playing in the Dark* (1992) in which she is trying to prove that Africanism is an inseparable part in defining Americanness. Thus Morrison views black American history as the history of whole American experience (Morrison, 1993, 14).

Slave trade was greatly related to racial prejudices and racial segregation. Although in 1865 slavery was abolished in America, the South was still governed by white politicians. Ku-Klux-Klan, an organization established in 1865, oppressed and terrorized the blacks. Racial inequality and stereotypes were imposed on all aspects of Black Americans' lives – education, literature, music, art. Black women had to face a twofold struggle because they suffered both racial prejudice and sexual abuse by the white masters and black males. African-American women treated as slaves were depicted as animals and prostitutes, and

this treatment created the imposed derogatory image of Black Jezebel. Likewise, the numerous literary portrayals and treatment of black-skinned people as the "Other," as failing to live up to the standards of "normalcy" of white people by imposing negative meanings and stereotypes on them, were meant to legalize hierarchical racialized system and justify oppression in a white hegemonic American society. The negative stereotypes which defined and objectified them and which were internalized by many African-Americans (during the years of slavery until, roughly speaking, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement in the 1960s) were their natural, inborn depravity, laziness, carelessness, irresponsibility, aggressiveness, illiteracy, docility, physical ugliness, and the like. In addition, Black women's allegedly uncontrolled sexuality, their passionate nature was used to justify Black women's sexual exploitation. Thus the objectification of Black Americans and their internalization of the stereotypes imposed on them allow one to speak about a "racialized" identity of African-American people.

Tradition advocates essential values, verbal and written monuments, which defy time, and are passed from one generation to another. Tradition also has a correlation between preservation of cultural heritage and its innovation. Literary tradition is made of recurrent themes and forms of expression, whereas innovation and experiments can only be recognized against the tradition and manifests itself through the principle of intertextuality (Uzielienė, 2002, 1-2). The African-American theorist, critic and writer Henry Louis Gates, Jr. claims that intertextuality is central to the African-American tradition. He emphasizes similarities of African-American texts, especially genre forms and linguistic models which fall into these traditions, since writers have the tendency to read and revise the works of other writers. Therefore repetition, careful study of previous cultural heritage, is reflected in the process of signifying, which marks the essence of African-American literary tradition. However, Gates goes on to claim, repetition and revision occurs with a signal difference. Signification manifests primarily through hidden textual meanings and is loaded with parody and pastiche, which in their turn correspond to motivated and unmotivated Signifying respectively. The author argues that traditional African-American

texts have double formal antecedents, the Western and the Black, which gives double-voicedness to African-American literary tradition (Spikes, 1997, 44).

In African-American culture there is a link between the past and the present, a combination of cultural memory, the African experience and cosmogony (the origin of the universe, or a set of ideas about this). In the United States, the African tradition and experience was modified by the Christian one, a new type of culture and literature was being formed. Uzielienė states that the intentions to define Afro-American literary tradition have always led to contradictory questions, such as: what is uniquely Black or American about the literature by Black authors? What is the Black protagonist's identity – is it American or African-American? What is the African-American identity? Is Black literature of a racial or a more universal nature? What does it mean to be Black in White America? Therefore, at the heart of the Black experience there is the problem of double-consciousness (Uzielienė, 2002, 10). In the history of the African-American literary tradition there are two opposing cultural theories regarding the problem being confronted. One theory is "integrationist" and argues that the Black man must strive to integrate into the American experience, it chooses priority of American values over the Black ones. The other theory considers integration as impossible because America is not a homogeneous country to integrate into. Thus they speak in favor of group solidarity, ethnic independence and the "negritude." Historically, the African-American writer has always oscillated between these two aesthetic theories.

Gates remarks that the African-American tradition, unlike almost every other, "was generated as a response to 18th and 19th c. allegations that persons of African descent did not, could not, create literature" (Rivkin, Ryan, 2004, 987). As an academic area African-American studies first emerged during the 1960s. Ethnicity and race appeared as an important new approach to literary study in the late 1960s and early 1970s in America. Writers of different ethnic minorities – African-Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans – were concerned with the problem of representing the experiences and the lives of the "others", those who had been marginalized. Writers of many literary genres reflected on the conditions of the life of ethnic

American minorities in a society that was dominated by white supremacy. Those years witnessed the rise of previously "silent", marginal groups characterized by racial, ethnic, gender, class differences as well as by sexual preferences.

There are a few noticeable periods of African-American literary tradition: the early period (18th c.–early 1920s); the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940); the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts (or Black Aesthetic) Movement of the 1960s and 1970s; a postmodern moment in African-American literature (roughly speaking, it started in the 1970s and continues to the present day). One more conspicuous trend within the body of African-American literature is African-American women's literary tradition, the flowering of which in the 1970s and 1980s scholar and critic Joanne Braxton characterized as the "Afra American renaissance" (Stein, 2009, 14).

FUGITIVE AND EX-SLAVE NARRATIVES

A study of African-American literature and culture should be started with the analysis of the African-American oral tradition (which includes work songs, rhymes, jokes and riddles, spirituals, blues, legends, folk tales, in which they reflected on their own circumstances as an enslaved group, the "call and response" of spiritual leaders) and slave narratives (autobiographies, recollections, memoirs) which had a considerable influence on its formation, and which "comprise one of the most influential traditions in African-American literature and culture, shaping the forms and themes of some of the most celebrated and controversial writing, in both autobiography and fiction, in the history of the US" (Gray, 2012, 126). Narratives by fugitive slaves before the Civil War and by former slaves in the postbellum era are essential to the study of all 18th and 19th c. American history and literature. Autobiography became a dominant literary genre in the 18th c. In the US, "narratives of the escaped slave" rose to prominence in the 3rd decade before the Civil War.

In defining the slave narrative, Gates claims that it grafted together the conventions of two separate literary traditions – the novel of sentiment (confession) and the picaresque and became its own form (Spikes, 1997, 50). Another great influence upon the slave narrative, according to Gates, is the American romance, as like in other American romantic modes of narration, the language of the slave narrative is primarily an expression of the self, a conduit for particularly personal emotion (Spikes, 1997, 59). Thus the slave narrative as a literary genre combines elements of the novel of the sentiment, the picaresque, and the American romance. Generically the slave narrative can be linked to a variety of forms – from 17th c. captivity narratives and 18th c. autobiography to the domestic novel of the 19th c.

The general pattern of the slave narrative – an account of the life or a major part of the life, of a fugitive or former slave (written or orally related by the slave himself or herself) – documents of the slave's harsh conditions of life under slavery, the physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual damage that he suffered from white "Christian" slaveholders, his acquisition of literacy, a certain crisis

(turning point) in his life and an eventual escape from the slavery and the South (restriction) to the freedom of the North (opportunity) which (a journey to the North), in the words of Gates, is a leitmotif in these texts of the "evolution of consciousness within the slave – from an identity as property and object to a sublime identity as human being and subject" (Spikes, 1997, 48).

The vast majority of slave narratives' titles have the subtitle of "Written by Himself or Herself", as their authors felt authorship was important for their white readers of the mid-nineteenth c. Literacy and the ability of independent literary expression were powerful ways to dispel the main proslavery myth that slaves were incapable of mastering the arts of literacy. Also, in America of the middle of the 19th c. literacy was a sign of social prestige and economic power. Many slave narratives have prefaces (sometimes appendices) and introductions by white amanuensis to prove that the black narrator has a good character and is reliable as well as to draw the reader's attention to what the narrator will reveal about the abominations of slavery, and very few 19th c. narratives have a preface by a person of African descent. However, in both cases the prefaces seek to confirm the veracity of the narratives that follow them.

Despite their similar narrative features, the slave narratives have differences of the narrator's experience, geographical situation, public recognition etc. Morrison claims that they range from the adventure-packed life of **Oloudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1782)** to the quiet desperation of **Harriet Jacob's (Linda Brent's) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861);** from the political savvy of **Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845)** to the subtlety and modesty of **Henry Bibb's *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849)** (Morrison, 2008, 65-66). A white Unitarian minister claimed that despite certain differences in slave narratives, the story that the formerly enslaved ones had to tell had a universal value – these were stories of human struggle, stories of enslavement that actually proved to be stories of the essential importance of freedom, and they were stories "calculated to exert a very wide influence on public opinion" (Graham, Ward, 2011, 95-6).

Three major groups of slave narratives can be singled out:

1. Tales of religious redemption;
2. Tales to inspire the abolitionist struggle;
3. Tales of progress.

From the 1770s to the 1820s, the slave narratives generally described a spiritual journey leading to Christian redemption. The authors usually characterized themselves as Africans rather than slaves, as most were born in Africa. These early slave narratives include accounts of brutality and deliverance, and, as a critic notes, the pervasive metaphor for all life-writing of this kind was the teleological journey – a purposeful trek from birth to death, which is ultimately redeemed spiritually and artistically by the guidance of Providence and the earthly agents of God. The masterpiece of early slave narratives, as well as the earliest slave narrative which received international attention, is the aforementioned ***The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano*** which describes Equiano's simple, plain, and blissful life in his native land (Eden), his captivity, the terror of the Middle Passage and time spent in enslavement (the Fall), and recounts his attempts to become an independent man, his rising up from slavery, his learning to read, and his purchase of his freedom. Finally, Equiano experiences a religious vision, and is "born again" to become one of "God's children" (Redemption). The narrator believes that all the good things of his life are due to the workings of divine Providence. Equiano's text established the form of the slave narrative and, indirectly or otherwise, it has influenced American writing and African-American writing in particular – to the present day. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano* is "the first in a great tradition of American narratives that juxtapose the dream of freedom with the reality of oppression, the Edenic myth (...) with a history of fall and redemption" (Gray, 2012, 74).

From the mid-1820s, writers consciously chose the autobiographical form whose one purpose was to inspire the abolitionist movement by recounting their hardships under slavery and the atrocities of the institution to a white audience. The two most exemplary autobiographical (slave) narratives of this type include **Frederick Douglass's (1817-1895)** ***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass:***

An American Slave, Written by Himself and **Harriet Jacob's (1813-1897)** ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself.***

Douglass's – the most important 19th c. African-American writer - ***Narrative***, which is recognized not only as the most influential of all slave narratives but also as "one of the classic texts of African American, American, and world literatures" (Cain, 2004, 1009), established him as one of the leading spokespeople for the abolitionist cause. Douglass's autobiography (mediated by white writers abolitionists – one wrote a preface, the other – a letter) belongs to the tradition of fugitive-slave narratives popular in the North before the Civil War. Douglass's autobiography follows the conventional narrative structure of most narratives written at the time: he provides a first-person account of his life spent in slavery, his learning to read and write, a turning point in his life which strengthened his determination to escape from bondage, his arrival in the North and eventual success as an orator, lecturer dedicated to a black liberation movement. We learn in the *Narrative* that while working for one of his white masters, Douglass finds the means necessary to be himself. The central moment in the *Narrative* is discovery. He recounts the cruelty of his master who submitted everyone to unremitting work, starving and beating them, though he prayed and pretended to be devotional. Douglass recalls: "I was broken in body, soul, and spirit"; "the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (Douglass, 1986, 35). But then came the turning point, an illumination which made him make up his mind to stand up for himself. Douglass reveals to the reader: "You have seen how a man was made a slave, you shall see how a slave was made a man" (Douglass, 1986, 47). The narrator remembers the time when his master tried to beat him and he resisted and describes this battle as "the turning point in my career as a slave" (Douglass, 1986, 54). It was the moment when Douglass was ready to express his selfhood, his sense of his own worth and dignity at the expense of his life if necessary. The incident, as he admits, revived within him a sense of his own manhood, and the departed self-confidence as well as a determination to be free. Douglass's recovery of selfhood is described as his spiritual rebirth. After this Douglass spends four more years in slavery and tells the reader about the ways the brutal and hypocritical slave system dehumanizes

not only the slave but also the master. Douglass's text is not only historical – it also has a literary value as he shapes his characters and circumstances to communicate his ideas about slavery. His other important works include *The Heroic Slave* (1853), which is considered the first novella in African American literature; *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881).

An abolitionist speaker and reformer **Harriet Jacobs'** autobiography ***Incidents*** which was written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent (the book was edited by Maria Child) gives her the reputation of the first woman to author a fugitive slave narrative in the US. Jacobs states at the beginning of her own book: "I was born a slave" – a classic opening of slave narrative. She continues, however, in a different vein: "but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away." Jacobs (Linda Brent), a former slave and a fugitive, recounts her comfortable life in a "comfortable home" where she lived together with her parents and a brother, as her father was allowed to have his own trade though they were all slaves - the thing she found out after her parents' death and had to go not only through the general hardships of slavery, but also suffer sexual abuse of her white master.

One of the central themes of *Incidents* is betrayal of different kinds. Betrayal was the experience of Jacobs' great-grandmother and grandmother who, when freed, were captured and sold back into slavery, Jacobs' dying mother was betrayed when her white mistress promised to set all her children free but did not keep her promise.

Jacob's *Incidents* is not that different from Douglass's *Narrative*. And yet there are differences in the general meaning and tone of the two works. In *Incidents* there is more emphasis on family ties, blood relationships within the black community, than there is in the Douglass story. In addressing the reader, for example, there is more appeal to sentiment, to the reader's sympathy than to some abstract principles or feelings of anger. In *Incidents* women play a more important role than men: heroic women, like Jacobs' family women and evil women who betray promises. The tale focuses on the female experience of slavery and thus uses the techniques of the sentimental novel as well as those of

the slave narrative. And, in the words of one critic, at the center of the narrative is "that familiar protagonist of sentimental fiction: the young woman affronting her destiny – and, in due time, faced with a dangerous seducer (she became the object of her white master's sexual pursuit and to escape it, she became the lover of another white man and bore him two children – D.M.) – the female orphan making her way in the world" (Gray, 2012, 132). In the episode of escape, Jacobs did not flee to the North (as Douglass did). Instead, as she confesses to the reader, she hid in a small attic of her grandmother's house for seven years to be close to her children who lived there (she watched them through a hole she had made). Thus unlike Douglass, Jacobs achieves personal freedom not in lonely flight, heroic battle, or recovering manhood, but in being with her family, even if in separatio from them. However, after seven years in hiding she finally fled to the North where she was reunited with her children and had their freedom bought.

In recounting her sexual affairs as a slave woman, making a kind of confession and justifying herself, Jacobs shows that black female slaves could not conform to the traditional ideals of the **"Cult of True Womanhood"** (piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity) proclaimed in the antebellum decades of the 19th c. as they had been robbed of the traditional roles of woman, mother and wife. However, in William L. Andrews's words, "Harriet Jacobs turned her autobiography into a unique analysis of the myths and the realities that defined the situation of the African-American woman and her relationship to 19th c. standards of womanhood. As a result, "Incidents" occupies a crucial place in the history of American women's literature in general and African-American women's literature in particular" (Andrews, 1997, 889).

Other significant narratives of the period include a memoir and a slave narrative ***Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, 1853***[1]***; The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself, 1849*** – a slave narrative written by Josiah Henson, who later became famous for being the basis of the character of Tom from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852; a slave narrative ***The History of***

[1] The memoir has been adapted as 2 film versions, produced as the 1984 PBS television movie "Solomon Northup's Odyssey" and the Oscar-winning 2013 film "12 Years a Slave."

Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, by Mary Prince, 1831 – the first account of the life of a black woman which was published in the United Kingdom where she was living at the time.

After the defeat of the slave states of the Confederate South (the end of Civil War in 1865), the authors had less need to show the horrors of slavery and gave accounts of the narrator's adjustment to the new life of freedom. The writers focused on the story of individual and racial progress rather than that of securing freedom. This period in African-American autobiographical literature is best represented by **Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)** – the founder of Tuskegee Institute, a thinker, educator, and the most prominent black leader of his day who succeeded Frederick Douglass as the chief African- American spokesperson. He became prominent for his attempts to improve the lives of recently freed black Americans by involving them in the mainstream of American society (this policy was outlined in his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895). Washington is considered one of the most controversial of race leaders because of his often "accommodationist stance." In contrast to his famous contemporary African American sociologist, historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, who had a more confrontational attitude toward ending racial strife in America, Washington believed that Blacks should first prove themselves the equals of whites before asking for an end to racism.

Washington's most significant published work is his autobiography ***Up from Slavery*** **(1901)** which is partly a slave narrative and partly a collection of speeches he had made in the years after the founding of Tuskegee Institute. The work gives an account of more than forty years of his life: from slave to schoolmaster to the face of southern race relations. The word "Up" in the title emphasizes Washington's firm belief that African Americans can move upward if they use advantage of the opportunities offered to them and work hard to achieve a place of substance in the world. As with many slave narratives or life stories, there are accounts of the hardships of slavery, barrenness and desolation of the slave experience. However, what is unusual about Washington's account is that there are no any negative feelings about the institution of slavery or those who supported it. He does admit that slaves wanted freedom: "I have never seen

one who did not want to be free, or one who would return to slavery." However, unlike the authors of other slave narratives who saw slavery as hell (especially Douglass), Washington tended to emphasize its educative role. Slavery, according to him, was that "school" which helped prepare African Americans for the role they had to assume after the Civil War. He claims that "thanks to the school of American slavery Negroes…are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe." James Robinson notes in his Introduction to Washington's autobiography that, "throughout the entire book, (Washington) is conciliatory and forgiving toward southern whites and their system of racism and oppression" (Gray, 2012, 176). On the other hand, Washington stresses the big importance of education for blacks in achieving success. He describes his efforts to instill manners, breeding, health and a feeling of dignity to students. His educational policy emphasizes combining academic subjects with learning a trade. In this text, Washington achieves social and financial success through hard, manual labor, a good education, and his relationships with great people. The narrative is modelled on the archetypal American success story: a man (Washington) rises to prominence through his hard work, thrift, diligence and then reveals the secret of his success to his reader to enable him to rise as well. Washington's book *Up from Slavery* was a bestseller, and in 1998 the Modern Library listed the book at number 3 on its list of the 100 best nonfiction books of the 20th c.

Other works of note which fall into the category of post-bellum "Tales of Progress" are ***The Underground Railroad Records by William Still (1872)*** who is known as the Father of the Underground Railroad. Still carefully compiled and recounted the stories and methods of those who he had helped escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad and included them into the book. One of the few post-Emancipation published slave narratives is ***From the Darkness Cometh the Light, by Lucy Delaney, 1892***, which is the first-person account of a successful "freedom suit."

This early period of the African-American literary tradition can be characterized as the advancement of the "integrationist" theory of art. It can be

argued, however, that this "integration" was controversial as it had two aspects: positive and negative. As has been explored above, the aims of the authors of slave narratives were to render their personal experience of being a slave, to give an account of the dehumanizing nature of the institution of slavery in the hope of reaching the hearts and minds of white readership, to show that Black slaves were also human beings capable for perfection; by writing they asserted equality. The negative aspect of the "integrationist" theory was that a number of African-American authors who wrote in other literary genres sought assimilation. And to be able to assimilate the Black writer had either to make his Black characters "less black" or to depict Black people as whites wanted to see them. Some of the writers of the period (L. Dunbar, C.W. Chestnut, J.W. Johnson) reinforced the stereotypes of the "nigger": the contented slave or the comic Negro, the exotic primitive who does not question his inferior status, or the brute. The character of the "tragic mulatto" was the result of his wish to imitate whiteness, or "to pass"; his tragedy also lay in the fact that he could not completely fit in the white society or the black society and was equally scorned by both.

Consider the following:

1. What were the reasons for writing slave narratives? What were their settings and who were the authors?

2. Why was it important for white readers of the mid-nineteenth c. to see the "Written by Himself or Herself" subtitle in these narratives?

3. Why is authorship of one's own story so important?

4. What is the significance of the prefaces and introductions found in many slave narratives?

5. Why did these narratives need such prefaces? Would the color or the race of the preface writer matter to the slave narrative's white readership?

6. What is the plot of most pre-Civil and post-Civil War slave narratives? What is their focus? Why?

7. How do most slave narratives end? How do they portray life in the North?

Read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself* and comment on the following:

The turning point in the narrative is when Douglass confides to the reader: "You have seen how a man was made a slave." "You shall see how a slave was made a man." How is he "made a man"? What does he mean by a "man"?

Comment on Douglass's way to selfhood as a rebirth. What was the central moment (epiphany) in his life?

Further Reading:

Bruce, D. D., Jr. (2001). *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Chaney, M. (2007). *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Okpewho, I. (1992). *African Oral Literature: Background, Character, and Continuity.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Andrews, W. L. (1986). *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE, OR, THE NEW NEGRO MOVEMENT

The **Harlem Renaissance** was a cultural, social, and artistic explosion, a flowering in African-American life, and African-American intellectual reawakening in the 1920s which began in the New York district of Harlem and ended with the Great Depression in the early 1930s, though many of its ideas lived on much longer. Although the movement of Harlem Renaissance included numerous Black social thinkers, artists, jazz and blues musicians, it is best known for its literary production. Broadly speaking, the Harlem Renaissance was regarded to be a rebirth of African-American arts. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines a "renaissance" as a "rebirth" or "revival." However, some historians and critics believe that what took place during the years of Harlem Renaissance was not a rebirth, as such, but only another stage in the evolution of African and African-American art that had begun with the inception of African presence in America (Bernard, 2011, 269). Among representatives of the movement there was a growing sense that black America was on the verge of a second Emancipation which would be the result of the will and achievements of artists and intellectuals.

The Harlem Renaissance was inspired by the **Great Migration**. At the turn of the 20th c. African-Americans faced many factors that made them leave the South and move toward the North. These factors included great racist violence, suppression, natural disasters, and very few job opportunities. Migration from the American South to such big Northern urban cities as Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, or Washington DC opened up new economic opportunities, especially when at the outset of World War I in 1917, many white men left their jobs and joined the armed forces. The North was also the place which offered more cultural possibilities for those "who wanted to make the African-American voice heard" (Gray, 2012, 476).

The Harlem Renaissance was also closely associated with the **New Negro Movement** which was as much concerned with the creation of a fresh American identity as it was with the demise of the old (Bernard, 2011, 268). The New Negro Movement was an effort to define what it meant to be African-

American by African-Americans themselves. A crucially important event in African - American literature at the beginning of Harlem Renaissance years was the publication of ***The New Negro***[2] established and edited by **Alain Locke** in 1925 (alongside with others, for example, V.F. Calverton's *An Anthology of American Negro Literature*). Its contributors included men and women, black and white people of all generations. This collection of literary works – fiction, poetry, drama by African-Americans, essays on African-American art and literature alongside broader social issues advocated, as Locke called it "a spiritual coming of age", sought to declare the growth of a "common consciousness" among African-Americans and to show that "the American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro" (Gray, 2012, 477), as well as described a new sense of racial pride, personal and racial selfhood, and claimed that black is beautiful.

Then how was the **"Old Negro"** characterized? For example, as the writer A. Phillip Randolph explained, the "Old Negro" included "political conservatism, accommodationist politics, opposition to organized labor, and dependence upon white benefactors who had nothing but disdain for the working class," and they "stood in the way of racial progress (…) because of their involvement with the "Old crowd of White Americans – a group which viciously opposes every demand made by organized labor for an opportunity to live a better life" (Bernard, 2011, 273). One such, as Randolph pointed out, was an essayist, a novelist, and a political leader W.E.B. DuBois. For Locke, the "Old Negroes" were sambos, pickaninnies, bucks, mammies, Uncle Toms – stock figures that dominated the cultural landscape of the American South in broadsides, advertisements and minstrel shows (Bernard, 2011, 274).

The Harlem Renaissance tried to reject the notion of the "Old Negro" and his self-hatred. Negative images of black people were being replaced by the positive ones.

The New Negro Movement sparked off debates about the relationship between race and art. And notwithstanding the fact that the Black artists shared many ideas about the transforming power and future of the "New Negro" and

[2] The term the New Negro was not coined by Locke. It had been in use since the late 1890s.

his role in the advancement of African-Americans' social and cultural life, they adopted different stances on this point. For instance, **Langston Hughes** was one of those Harlem Renaissance writers who affirmed the notion of a purely black identity and claimed that black American experience lay in a direct line to the Motherhood (Africa); whereas writers as **Countee Cullen** and **Jean Toomer** questioned the term "black writer" itself, as they did not affirm the concept of a black identity as such. And indeed, what could Africa mean for African-Americans with mixed ancestries and bloodlines or for those who had no direct experience of it and for whom Africa was only an abstraction, and blackness – a puzzle? They envisioned an American identity that would transcend race. Thus some Harlem Renaissance authors claimed that a Black writer's work should be restricted to his black identity and black experience, whereas others attempted to rise above their race and embrace more universal aspects of human existence[3].

Among the most prominent writers of the period were a poet, novelist and short story writer **Claude McKay**, **Langston Hughes**, who worked in a great variety of genres, poet **Countee Cullen**, fiction writers **Zora Neal Hurston** and **Nella Larsen**, fiction writer and poet **Jean Toomer**. In their work they reconsidered Black history and Black identity, explored Black folklore, the dialect forms of language, oral tradition. They attempted to explore the theme of Black experience using a new – modernist experimental and novel – artistic form (modernism was a dominant trend in literature and the arts both in America and Europe in the first decades of the 20th c.).

Folklorist, playwright, anthropologist, and novelist **Zora Neale Hurston (1903-1960)** is considered an early feminist, a forerunner of African-American women's movement who inspired and influenced such contemporary African-American writers as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, especially through her autobiography ***Dust Tracks on the Road*** **(1942).** In her works Hurston was trying to make the point that a human being creates and defines himself through his art of speaking. In other words, she was convinced that individuals

[3] In contemporary African-American literature some writers believe that identity (in this case, black) is formed in the community (e.g. Toni Morrison) and others (e.g. Alice Walker) argue that it can be created outside a particular community.

and communities "voice themselves into being, that they achieve identity and continuity through the telling of themselves" (Gray, 2012, 481).

Hurston's masterpiece novel ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*** **(1937)** is a depiction of a beautiful mulatto woman's maturation, - discovery of her true identity. Her aim in this book (and in her other works) was to revise and adapt vernacular forms to give voice to women: to create a genuinely democratic oral culture, or, as she put it, "words walking without masters" (Gray, 2012, 481), as she had noticed that African-American women in particular were denied access to the pulpit and porch – the privileged sites of storytelling – and hence the chance of self-definition. The central character of the novel Janie Crawford concludes: "Two things everybody's got tuh do for theyselves, they got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" (Hurston, 1991, 34). The irony is that she has to win the right to see and speak about living for herself. Janie has to resist the humiliating stereotypes and definitions imposed on her by society as a black person and a woman. She has to disobey the order of one of her husbands not to engage in "porch talk." What Janie has to do is to claim her own voice, and in the process her own self and rightful place in the vocal community. Her grandmother Nancy, an ex-slave, tells her that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (Hurston, 1991, 56). However, being dignified, Janie does not give up her desire to realize herself through two, though loveless, marriages. She finally finds love and joy in her third marriage as well as the opportunity to be her own self and to speak for herself. And although the marriage ends tragically – her husband dies a violent death, Janie is an already changed, singular, and mature woman who can participate in the "porch talk" of the community. She has found her true speech and thus her true self.

Hurston's other works of importance include the novel ***Jonah's Gourd Vine*** **(1934)** in which the main character – a poet and a preacher – establishes his identity through art; a collection of African-American folk tales, songs, games, and hoodoo practices ***Mules and Men*** **(1935)**.

African-American culture contributed greatly to the rise of jazz in the 1920s, what came to be called the **Jazz Age**, or the **"Roaring Twenties."** Alongside with the extreme popularity of jazz music, the Jazz age was marked by a glamorous

life-style, the New York nightlife dominated by cabarets, buffet flats, ballrooms, speakeasies[4], nightclubs which presented such black performers as John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Bessie Smith, and others. Many Harlem Renaissance writers and artists were greatly influenced by jazz music (as well as blues) and employed elements of jazz in their work[5].

One of the many talented writers of the Harlem Renaissance was **Langston Hughes (1902-1967).** He was versatile and worked in many literary genres – poetry, fiction, drama, autobiography, and the essay. But it was his poetry that left an indelible mark in the African-American literature of the period. Hughes's collections of poems ***The Weary Blues (1926), Fine Clothes to the Jew*** **(1927),** ***Harlem*** **(1942),** ***Montage of a Dream Deferred*** **(1951),** and ***Ask Your Mama*** **(1961)** reveal his deeply-felt commitment to the idea of a separate and distinctive black identity that he spoke about in his influential essay ***The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*** **(1926).** In the essay he wrote: "To my mind, it is the duty of the young Negro artist to change through the force of his art that old whispering 'I want to be white' hidden in the aspirations of his people, to 'Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro – and beautiful" (Hughes, 1999, 1025). Hughes explained that this does not mean that the black writer should simply idealize black life. "We know we are beautiful and ugly too," he observed. What he meant was that black writers' should uncover the rich heritage – the power and glory – of African-American traditions. In his attempt to embrace the multiple layers, the pace, and diversity of African-American life, the poet speaks through multiple voices, for example, through the voice of a young schoolchild in "Theme for English B," a dying man in "Sylvester's Dying Bed," or a smart and sassy older woman in "Madam's Past History." Hughes was a socially committed poet and always stressed his devotion to black community and culture.

In many of his poems, Hughes employs elements of African-American jazz music, blues, spirituals, folklore, and colloquial speech. Hughes admitted that

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[4] A speakesy – (esp. In the US in the 1920s and 1930s) a place for going to buy and drink alcohol illegally. They were often connected with gangsters and seen as exciting, wicked places.

[5] Among those who were influenced by the blues, and black cultural musical forms, were some other African-American writers of the transitional generation who wrote mostly in prose: Dorothy West (1907-1998), Margaret Walker (1915-1998), and Richard Wright (1908-1960).

many of his poems had a racial theme, and in many of them he tried to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. Hughes believed that the essence of jazz was that it was improvisational, subversive, and open-ended and therefore challenged the closed structures of the dominant white culture (Gray, 2012, 489). Hughes argued that jazz was a heartbeat, "this heartbeat is yours." Jazz, as he saw it, was a vast sea "that washes up all kinds of fish and shells and spume with a steady old beat, or off-beat." And by the sea he must have meant the source of African American oral cultural traditions - spirituals, work songs, field hollers, and shouts as well as the source of blues, ragtime, gospel, and roc and roll that helped release a myriad of feelings and emotions: joy, sorrow, pain, nostalgia, and suffering. Jazz for Hughes was also an act of rebellion. Some of the author's best poems in which he incorporates rhythms, themes, and vocabulary of jazz and blues include "Seven Moments in Love," "Still Here," "The Weary Blues," "The Cat and the Saxophone," "Montage of a Dream Deferred."

The complex dilemma that Hughes presents in his essay ***The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain***, is about whether one is a poet or a Negro poet, that is, whether race is an essential feature or a social construct of a black writer's identity. How big is the difference between American and African-American? This dilemma continues to exist in our own time and is reflected on in the works of many contemporary African-American writers.

However, the Harlem Renaissance was still partly based on the "integrationist" premises as the publication of the work by black authors largely depended on the taste and priorities of white publishing-houses.

The artists and intellectuals of Harlem Renaissance had faith in the future of the "New Negro," they believed in democratic reforms and in the power of art and literature to effect these changes. However, Harlem Renaissance ended with the start of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, which questioned the importance and centrality of culture, unrelated to economic and social realities.

Questions and tasks:

I.

1. What were the reasons for the emergence of Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s?

2. Comment on the literary and cultural scene of Harlem Renaissance. What ideas did the writers and artists share and how did their opinions differ? (Consider their attitude to the role of the black writer in relation to his art).

3. Why was the Harlem Renaissance called the "New Negro" movement?

4. Discuss the differences and similarities between the "Old" and the "New" Negro.

5. What caused the end of Harlem Renaissance and why?

II.

Read Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and do the following tasks:

1. Develop the writer's idea that her aim in this novel (and in her other works) was to create words "walking without masters."

2. Comment on Hurston's thought that a person defines himself through speaking, and the artist – through his art.

3. Discuss the main character Janie's way to selfhood.

4. What do you think makes this novel an example of early feminist literature?

III.

Writing assignment:

Several black musicians, such as John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, are mentioned in this chapter. Research the backgrounds of these musicians (you may choose some other ones who performed in the years of Harlem Renaissance) and speak on their cultural and social significance.

Further Reading:

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THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA AND THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT (BLACK AESTHETIC) (1960s-1970s)

The 1960s can be considered a turning point in American social, political, and cultural life. The emergence of counterculture, anti-war movements, the movement of ethnic minorities, women's liberation movement, the Feminist revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, which caused widespread civil unrest in the country, the assassinations of president John Kennedy, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and a civil rights activist Malcolm X, made Americans reconsider sets of values they had adhered to before.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, African-American poets, literary critics, and theorists produced a large body of works which reflected the spirit of **Black Power** self-determination and African-American expressive culture. Two seminal books ***Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*** **(1968)** and ***The Black Aesthetic*** **(1971)** were published which included the work of creative artists and intellectuals who committed themselves to producing artistic and cultural works to black audiences. The former work had an especially powerful effect upon the black audience when it was released in 1968, as the contributors in the collection seemed to embody the spirit of rebellion and revolution all over the country when black people rioted in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. The anthology illustrates the idea of the Black experience revitalized in the powers of Soul, which dissolves the boundaries between art and life (Morrison, 2008, 54). **Negritude and *Soul*** reflect a special concept of African-American spiritual condition, the ever changing state of art and soul, the rejection of the Western dichotomies of reason vs. heart, concrete vs. abstract, action vs. thinking, individual vs. group etc. Some literary works published in the two anthologies had a racist, militant, and nationalistic character. For instance, Marvin X (Marvin E. Jackmon) ends his poem "That Old Time Religion" with the line "LET THERE BE BLACKNESS OVER THIS LAND / LET BLACK POWER SHINE AND SHINE." Another author addresses a white authority figure by saying "Man, your whole history / Ain't been nothing but a hustle." And Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones), who was considered Father

of the Black Arts Movement, wrote: "The black man is the future of the world," "Let black people understand that / they are the lovers and the sons of lovers / and warriors and sons of warriors." In a poem called "Black Art," he says: "we are black magicians, black art / & we make in black labs of the heart /…/ … we own / the night." (Gray, 2012, 641). These nationalist and confrontational statements as well as an emphasis on the superiority of blackness, black pride and black aesthetic, were characteristic of many African-American writings during the 1960s and 1970s. The bulk of this kind of writing is permeated with race pride. The contributors of the two anthologies included such prominent Black Arts era figures as **Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones), Sonia Sanchez, Ed Bullins, Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti), Gwendolyn Brooks,** and others. The essence of the works included into the two anthologies was defined as the Black Arts Movement.

The origins of the Black Arts Movement and Black Aesthetic discourses are multifaceted and deeply rooted in African-American political and literary thought (Smethurst, Rambsy, 2011, 406). Artists of the New Negro Movement of the 1920s and later generations of black writers produced literary works that stressed Black nationalism and critiques of white racism. Yet, the terms the "Black Arts Movement," "Black Arts," "Black Aesthetic" emerged due to the aforementioned events that took place in the middle of the 1960s. The majority of artists of the Black Arts Movement claimed the specificity of African-American art, suggested aesthetic separatism, advocated a nationalistic approach to literature, viewed art as a weapon, and had intentions to withdraw from the dialogue with White society.

The artists of the Civil Rights Movement period **Richard Wright (1908-1960), James Baldwin (1924-1987), Ralph Ellison (1914-1994)** try to balance between the demands of being a Black writer and various tensions. They present "Black material," however, at the same time they tend to move away from racial focus in literature and try to stress the universal human experience, pointing out the fact that an artist can reveal, or at least attempt to reveal the experience of all people. Wright's ***Native Son*** **(1940)** and **Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952)** enriched the African-American literary tradition with philosophical existential depth. Their work highlight themes of a black man's alienation, discrimination and humiliation in white society, however, at the very center of their fiction is

a character's loss of identity and his desperate attempts to discover his true self, and in case of failing to do that, at least "invent" himself.

In his two autobiographical books ***Black Boy* (1945)** and ***American Hunger* (1977), Wright** traces his life from childhood in his native South to adulthood in the North, - a journey in search for identity. For Wright, identity was a social and cultural construct, not natural: it had to be won, struggled, and suffered for. He believes that all African-Americans had been denied a similar knowledge. In *Black Boy* he speaks about "the cultural barrenness of black people," "the essential bleakness of black life in .America," as, according to him, "Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization." Wright claims that the most severe blow they received from white society was their exclusion from a sense of fully being in the world. However, the author believed that he had made himself. He realized his blackness, his belonging to the black race when at the same time he managed to go beyond the restrictions of race. *Black Boy* and *American Hunger* "constitute one of the great retellings of the American myth of personal reinvention, the making of an identity" (Gray, 2012, 500-1).

Wright's most important book was the novel **Native Son.** The protagonist of the novel – an uneducated black youth – mistakenly kills his white master's daughter, burns her body, and murders his black girlfriend, fearing she will betray him. Fear is the emotional condition of the character's life. This second act is seen as the product not of will, but of circumstance and the violence it engenders. Waiting in prison for his trial, the protagonist feels free for the first time in his life as, he believes, he has broken out of the prison of himself. He finally comes to realize his emotional state as well as his motives, reasons for his violence, and arrives at the conclusion that "what I killed for, I am!" Thus he realizes his true essence and identity.

In Wright's later works, there are noticeable traces of existentialism, for instance, in the novel ***The Outsider* (1953*)*** which centers on a young black intellectual's search for identity. In his later nonfiction works (***Black Power* 1954**, ***White Man Listen!* 1957**), there is a move toward **Black nationalism**. The writers of Black Aesthetic of the 1960s considered him their forerunner, as they saw his militancy and the willingness to use art as a weapon. Wright argued,

however, that although black writers' mission was to influence "human affairs" with their art, writing had a certain professional autonomy. He was convinced that if a literary work is too didactic, "the artistic sense is submerged." For him, literature was coextensive with life, but they were not to be confused with each other. Every first rate novel, poem, or play "lifts the level of consciousness higher." Thus, according to him, imaginative writing was a vital agent of awareness and luminous revelation of change – an enabler of life (Gray, 2012, 502-3).

Baldwin, too, dealt with issues of race in his work, explored the theme of African-American identity, - many of his characters oscillate between the necessity to integrate themselves in the mainstream of American society, accept White standards of living and thus gain recognition, and a sense of security and being their own selves. Baldwin's major concern, however, was about sexuality. In many of his stories and essays he examined what it meant to be both Black and homosexual at a time when neither was accepted by American culture. Baldwin's best known work is the autobiographical novel ***Go Tell It on the Mountain*** **(1953)** about a youth who seeks self-knowledge and religious faith. His other important works include ***Another Country*** **(1962)** which centers on racial issues and homosexuality, and ***Nobody Knows my Name*** **(1961)** – a collection of personal essays about racism, the role of the artist, and literature.

In the genre of prose, **Ellison's** only novel ***Invisible Man***[6] was a highly original and important event in the history of African-American literature since World War II. The main theme of the work is the black protagonist's search for identity and individuality both as an African-American and a human being. It is an account of a young black's awakening to racial discrimination and his battle against the refusal of white Americans to see him apart from his ethnic background, which in turn leads to his humiliation and disillusionment. The novel is set in the 1930s and describes the experiences of its anonymous protagonist (who is also the narrator) as he travels through America in search of his identity trying to cope with the dilemma that Ellison summed up in one of his essays: "the nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are" (Gray, 2012, 652). The main metaphor of the novel is human invisibility.

[6] The novel won the National Book Award in 1953.

First, white society ignores the individuality and humanity of the blacks and views them as stereotypes. They are exploited and their needs are disregarded. Thus black Americans become invisible. Secondly, the protagonist is white-oriented and feels inferior and ashamed of his dark skin color. Thus he is part of the crowd of people who comply with the rules and customs prescribed by white society. All throughout the novel, the Invisible Man forms his life according to other people's life models, imitates them and refuses to question his own choices and preferences. Therefore, he ignores his own responsibility in his development and acknowledgment as a visible man. The novel also reflects upon the socio-historical factors of life in the middle of the 20th c. America. It shows all the cruelties, humiliation and injustice that a black man had to face in white society. Believing that "white is right," and black is unimportant, the protagonist does not see the extent of his invisibility and authenticity until the end of the novel. He is constantly betrayed by all people who he trusted, and finally he realizes that he has to distance himself from other people in order to see and understand himself. In this way he searches for a solution. The protagonist understands that he himself is responsible for his identity and acknowledgement by other people.

Invisible Man has features of postmodern novel with regard to the main theme, - the protagonist is not only African-American, he is also a universal human being melted and assimilated in a consumer society which obliterates all individuality of a person. The novel is also an example of a Bildungsroman in that it is a character's journey to self-understanding and selfhood. Viewed in this context, the author seems to emphasize the idea that individual should find the strength to resist the oppressive power of (modern / postmodern) civilization. In Ellison's view, if individual accepts the norms and opinions imposed on him, if he fears to be different from the mob and allows others to rule his life, he has no chance to become a genuine and visible personality.

Questions and tasks:

I. Discuss the ideas of Existentialism in Richard Wright's novel Native Son.

II. Questions to James Baldwin's short story Sonny's Blues:

1. From whose point of view is *Sonny's Blues* told? How do the narrator's values and experiences affect his view of the story? How would the story change if it were told by Sonny?

2. What event prompts the narrator to write to his brother?

3. What does the narrator's mother ask him to do for Sonny? Does the older brother keep his promise?

4. The major characters in this story are called Mama, Daddy and Sonny (the older brother is never named or even nicknamed). How do these names affect our sense of the story?

5. Explain the significance of the statement in the final paragraphs of the story: "Now these are Sonny's blues." How has Sonny made this music his own?

III. Tasks on Ellison's Invisible Man:

1. Comment on the structure and narrative peculiarities of the book.

2. Why do you think the narrator – the Invisible Man – is not given any proper name?

3. Explain the metaphor of "invisibility" in the novel.

4. How does the narrator handle his "invisibility"? Explain why.

5. What does he mean when he says he can see the darkness of lightness? What outwardly light places does he say are the darkest parts of American culture? What does he mean by this?

6. Why does he say Louis Armstrong was able to make poetry out of being invisible?

7. How is an invisible person's sense of time different from that of a visible person?

8. How does his sense of time help the narrator to understand Armstrong's music?

9. Is race the only criterion that society uses to make a person invisible?

10. How are the black characters in the novel portrayed?

Further Reading:

Gayle, A. (Ed.). (1971). *The Black Aesthetic*. New York: Doubleday.

THE POSTMODERN TURN IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE AND NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVES

In 1970 there was a burst of literary activity in African-American literature: twenty-five novels, major dramatic works, and volumes of poetry were released. This event has been called by some critics the beginning of the second renaissance of black women's writing, whereas others consider this moment as the emergence of black literary postmodernism (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 569). **Black postmodern literature** shares many features common to all postmodernism(s), – it is characterized as self-conscious, self-reflexive, and it first of all aims to revise history, identity, and aesthetics.

One of the aims of postmodern African-American literature is to "provoke critical self-reflection about the demands for racial representation that have been historically been placed on black writers" (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 569). From its beginnings in the 19th c. slave narratives and all black literature has been expected to realistically depict the race – African-Americans – and speak about their experience as a whole. **Postmodern African-American writers** self-consciously revise the dominant traditional literary forms of racial representation by parodying these forms and revealing them to be textual constructs, and not true-to-life reflections of black life. Since the 1970s there has been a growing interest in the historical past as well as the implications of this past for post-Civil Rights explorations of black identity. It should be noted that it was the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s that introduced a cultural redefinition of blackness that was in part responsible for the literary innovations of postmodern African-American authors. However, these authors also rejected Black Arts ideals of racial identity and community. Literary and cultural critics broadly agree that postmodernism in the African-American context is "defined by a heightened attention to the intraracial differences (of class, gender, and sexuality) that had been suppressed in black cultural nationalist discourse" (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 566).

As far as **dominant postmodern paradigms of identity and aesthetics** are concerned, a number of innovative formal strategies were used in an attempt

to represent a post-1970s **black "polyconsciousness"** in literature. These formal strategies include **textual fragmentation** (which reveals a character's split consciousness, or, polyconsciousness, his fragmentary mind), **linguistic bricolage**[7], and the **transgression of generic and cultural boundaries**.

Postmodernism questions the idea of objectivity and "objective truth," especially historical truth. How do we know what is fact and what is fiction? Postmodern writers working in the genre of the novel revise significant points of history by critically rewriting traditional narrative forms, especially slave narratives and narratives of migration. They often use parody to show the unreliability of the official historical account of slavery. Such novels are referred to as works of **historiographic metafiction** (a genre of postmodern novel) – the literary theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon's term for postmodern novels concerned with history.

Historiographic metafiction raises the question "How do we know the past?" and acknowledges the need to question the received versions of history. It does not seek to tell the truth but considers the question of whose truth gets told. It questions the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. In postmodernism, both history and fiction are treated as cultural sign systems, ideological constructions. Historiographic metafiction reflects the postmodern view that we can know "reality" only as it is produced and sustained by cultural representations of it (Hutcheon, 1998, 123).

In the 1960s the historical archive of slavery expanded, and this inspired the literary works of realist historical novels of slavery that drew on oral tradition as a "way of recovering the subjective experience of slaves" (Dubey, Goldberg, 2001, 598). The first African-American novel which dealt with the return to the historical moment of slavery was **Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966)** - a literary adaptation of her great-grandmother's oral tales of slavery. From the 1970s onward there have been several major texts of the slave narrative told from the first or third person point of view of the slave himself or herself, for instance, **Barbara Chase-Riboud's** novel ***Sally Hemings* (1979)** about Thomas Jefferson's

[7] Intertextuality, the shaping of a text's meanings by reference to other texts; collage.

longtime slave mistress, with whom he had several children; **Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976); Anne William's *Dessa Rose* (1986).**

Contrary to the aforementioned novels, most **neo-slave narratives** experiment with narrative form and voice to examine the legacy of slavery which continues into the 20th c. As an example, one can mention **Toni Morrison's** novel ***Beloved* (1987),** which tells the story of escaped slave Margaret Garner. Here the author employs postmodern techniques such as fragmentation of linear time to piece together traumatic memory, what Morrison's characters call "re-memory." The novel's concern with temporality is a "striking manifestation of the specifically African American expression of postmodernism" (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 599). Other novels that illustrate this particular approach to time and trauma include **Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975)** and **Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979)** which is considered the postmodern slave narrative in her use of time-travel device. Timothy Spaulding defines the postmodern slave narrative as "that proliferating sub-genre of late twentieth-century novels of slavery that violate the conventions of narrative realism." He goes on to explain that "the break from realism in recent narratives of slavery disrupts the governing protocols of historical representation, in particular calling into question the positivist truth-claims of modern historiography" (Spaulding, 2005, 18-19).

A number of African-American writers in post-1952 fictional creation, like the ones before them, look to the South for its imaginative inspiration. And this kind of fictional creation has been called the neo-slave narrative, a term first coined by Bernard Bell. **Ashraf Rushdy's** book ***Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999)** provides the most comprehensive study of the genre to date. Rushdy defines the neo-slave narrative as that body of "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative." For some authors, slavery serves as a textual layer to their fiction, whereas for others, slavery is the incentive for their literary creations.

Trudier Harris divides **neo-slave narratives** into **four categories** (Harris, 2011, 475): the texts by women writers for whom slavery serves as the center of their narratives as they represent their female characters (Margaret Walker's

Jubilee (1966), Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), J. California Cooper's *Family* (1991). In these texts, the experiences of the characters are contemporary with the chronology of slavery and its immediate aftermath. In the second category, characters in the 20th c. find themselves haunted by and / or experiencing the conditions of slavery (Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* (1998). In the third category, slavery is the subject of satire (Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada (1976), Charles Johnson's Middle Passage (1990).

The writers of neo-slave narratives, in which the characters experience slavery directly and chronologically with it, reveal new aspects of the condition of slaves (during or after the slavery), of the relationships between black slaves and their masters, between a black female slave and her white master and a white mistress, and between the blacks themselves. Some authors of these neo-slave narratives show instances of black slaves' heroic resilience and defiance against their white masters; mutual sexual desire of persons who could be attracted to each other in spite of race, class, or previous condition of servitude; the possibility of black female slave's friendship with a white woman; the jealousy that existed between white women and attractive black women on plantations as well as the black woman's jealousy towards the white woman who becomes the mistress of the black man she loves.

As it has been noted, another feature of neo-slave narratives is depicting characters in the 20th c. who are returned back into slavery or who are so haunted by it that they have difficulty living healthy lives in the 20th c. The family histories of characters in each of these texts are different, and each character haunted by the memories of the historical past (by the memories of the lives of his / her ancestors), has to find his or her own way to shake off the burden of the past in order to live at peace.

Jones's *Corregidora* could serve here as an example. The main character Ursa Corregidora is locked into memories of slavery because of motherlove. Both her grandmother and great-grandmother were raped by the same Brazilian slaveholder Corregidora who then turned them into prostitutes. He observed no morality that

could prevent him from having sex with his daughters and granddaughters, so he burned family records in order to erase his immoral actions. To counter that erasure, the women vowed to give birth to daughters and to pass on the narrative to their daughters; and thus the story has come down to Ursa. Her family history in slavery and after it is a heavy burden to Ursa, who can hardly imagine what life will be like when she is made barren after being pushed down a flight of stairs. In this narrative, the past always intrudes into the present and oppresses her psychologically, though she cannot identify the reason. Remembering the past is praiseworthy, it should heal a person, but the past here features only a violent white male ancestor. Thus here memory is not a healing power, for it has an aura of vengeance, and not self-revelation or self-improvement. Memory imprisons Ursa more than it frees her, she is tied to a static history rather than to a dynamic one. Thus Ursa is challenged to put the past into perspective, to recognize that her own body cannot continue to be the instrument for retaining negative historical memory, that she, as an individual, has a right to move forward no matter how horribly her ancestors were treated. Ursa must find a way to cope with the past, with the memories without them destroying her future. She must find another means of procreation. Also, she must put the past in perspective and push aside the weight of the past and make space for herself instead of living her life for her ancestors.

Although the characters of these narratives are haunted by different memories of the past, what the authors make them do is understand that the past is merely the past. They are forced to accept - and then embrace - the claims that the past makes upon them. In other words, the characters have to relive the past, reconsider it, and go on with their lives.

Other authors of neo-slave narratives (**Reed, Johnson**) treat the serious subject of slavery with light humor. They claim that slavery, as a racial institution, also had a rich, double-edged tradition of humor. Humor was a central, creative means through which African-Americans survived and confronted centuries of oppression. As Glenda Carpio has noted, humor can at once be a strong critique of racial injustice, but at the same time "give life to the whole storehouse of fantasies produced in the hothouse of a racially divisive past and an equally – if differently – divisive present" (Carpio, 2008, 27). Reed and Johnson challenge the

reader to better understand the problematic relationship between an African-American racial history and humor, which may "complicate the distinctions between polite and popular representations of slavery" (Carpio, 2005, 28). In his novel ***Flight to Canada***, using anachronism (the protagonist takes an airplane ride out of slavery), Reed employs historical figures and historical types of plantation owners. The author reveals the seamier sides of slavery and shows the perversion throughout the institution. He hints at a sexual relationship between the plantation owner and the black slave (Mammy Barracuda) as well as his sister. There are also hints of the plantation mistress's perverse relationship to Mammy Barracuda. The author also broaches the subject that some blacks were complicit in slavery. However, Reed shows that everything and everyone associated with the institution is a fair game. He demonstrates the absurdity of slavery by representing it in an equally absurd way. Reed uses anachronisms to draw parallels between the historical past (the period of slavery) and the 20th c. racial politics. By using the parodic mode the writer raises the question about whether the realistic form of representation can convey the full meaning of slavery today, many years after its official end.

The topic of slavery continues in the 21st c. The most outstanding example is **Edward P. Jones's** novel ***The Known World*** **(2003).** Although the primary focus of the book is on slavery, it is the first narrative in which an African-American writer chronicles the holding of enslaved persons by a man of African descent[8]. One of the major purposes of the neo-slave narrative was to show the enslaved people as agents possessing complex humanity. In this novel, however, blacks stand out as villains, and as cruel as whites.

The variety of representations and interpretations of the institution of slavery by writers of neo-slave narratives confirm the fact that the panorama of slavery provides the rich material on which to rewrite, reconsider, and re-envision History.

[8] There is historical documentation that some African-Americans owned others.

Questions and tasks:

1. Discuss the differences and similarities between 19th c. slave narratives and 20th c. neo-slave narratives.

2. What new aspects of slavery are revealed in neo-slave narratives and what purpose do they serve?

3. How does the realist slave narrative differ from the postmodern slave neo-narrative?

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CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

The emergence of feminist views in the 1970s highlighted the essence of African-American women's literature which was not regarded as noteworthy before. African-American women's literary tradition is marked by common themes such as racial and gender inequality, fate and condition of a black female and female writer, the peculiarities of the formation of black woman's identity, her search for selfhood, her position and roles in a multicultural society, and black woman's consciousness.

In the 1970s women began to openly express their experience as both suppressed women and members of minority groups. The black women writers of the period – **Glorya Naylor**, **Toni Cade Bambara**, **Shirley Anne Williams**, and **Gayl Jones** – explored the issues of their problematic position and struggle for liberation in a racial and mainstream culture. Their work marked a significant shift in African-American literature. As Catharine R Stimpson states, black women writers also claimed for the rejection of male power over women, the deconstruction of dominant images of black women, and the need for women to construct their own experience, history, and identity.

The most representative black female writers of recent period include **Toni Morrison**, **Alice Walker**, **Maya Angelou** who continue such central themes in African-American women's literary tradition as female friendship, search for and discovery of identity and community, racial oppression and sexual violence, the importance of ancestry.

The literature of former and recent African-American women writers provides a comprehensive view of Black women's struggle to form positive self-definitions in the face of derogatory images of Black womanhood. African-American women's experience of internalized oppression has been the prominent theme in African-American women's writing. Critic E. Shelley Reid claims that such contemporary African-American women writers as Morrison and Walker in their fiction mark a pivotal change in African-American literary tradition because they have been transforming the strategies used by earlier African-

American novelists who not only challenged negative images imposed on black women but employed an innovative style of writing such as "interlocutory dialogic style" and giving voice to "multiple characters through multiple settings in time and place." Therefore it is right to say that contemporary women writers not only continue African-American women's literary tradition but they also enrich this tradition with new elements thus making it more significant. In their works African-American writers of recent period revisit the historical past and African-American traditions and experiment with postmodern techniques in an attempt to express their attitude to intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford) (1931) is one of the leading American novelists, an essayist, a literary critic, and editor, the first African-American woman writer who was awarded a Nobel Prize for literature (1993). Morrison grew up in a very spiritual family that greatly cherished black culture. Thus, storytelling, songs, folktales, were formative elements of her childhood that she later incorporated in her work.

Among the themes of Morrison's writings are the damage that racial violence brings to black cultural traditions, and the means by which African-Americans must act to preserve their heritage. Only two of her novels – ***Beloved* (1987)** and ***A Mercy* (2008)** - are set in the years of slavery. In her other works the writer shows the effects of slavery upon the psyche of black people who have never experienced it directly and suggests the idea that in order to understand the present, it is necessary to reconsider the past, embrace it, and learn how to live with it . One of the best examples that illustrates this idea is *Beloved* which is based on the true story of a runaway slave who, at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter, who she does not want to be sold into slavery, and is later in torment by feelings of guilt. And only when she relives and reconsiders the act of murder and finally forgives herself, she achieves liberation.

Morrison's other themes include the experiences of black women, female friendship, motherhood, clashes between blacks and whites, a black man's violence, his irresponsibility, immorality, black racism, black people's inferiority complex, and thus their acceptance of the models of white society and stereotypes

imposed on them. For instance, the protagonist of Morrison's first novel ***The Bluest Eye*** **(1970)** Pecola is shaped by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes, as she thinks that if she becomes beautiful, she will be loved. In this novel, the author explores the influence of White ideals of beauty on black female identity showing that it may be destructive. The novel poses the questions: "What is physical beauty?", "How do we learn to form a self-image?", and explores the pain of wanting to be somebody else. Morrison writes: "Implicit in her desire to have blue eyes was racial self-loathing" (Morrison, 2007, XI). One more important theme of the writer's works is a quest for identity. Some characters (for instance, Milkman Dead in ***The Song of Solomon*** **(1977)**) discover their true selves in searching for their origins. Sula in the novella ***Sula*** **(1973)** tries to create her identity outside the community but unfortunately, fails. So, the thematic structure of Morrison's literary works is very colorful. Her other novels include ***Tar Baby*** **(1981),** ***Jazz*** **(1992),** ***Paradise*** **(1998),** ***Love (2003)***, ***A Mercy*** (it deals with slavery in 17th c. America) **(2008),** ***Home*** **(2012),** ***God Help the Child*** **(2015).**

Morrison's nonfiction works include ***What Moves at the Margin (Selected Nonfiction 1971-2002), Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*** **(1992),** ***The Unspeakable Things Unspoken*** **(1988)** that illuminates the ways in which African-American literature has been marginalized.

In 1993 the Nobel Committee bestowed on Toni Morrison the Nobel Prize in literature – the most prestigious literary prize in the world. The lecture comes in the form of a story. It explores the uses and misuses of language and power and the interconnectedness of all people, particularly of those of different generations. She tells a story that is part of the folklore of different cultures. The story emphasizes issues that can be found in her works: the ways people of different cultures are marginalized, oppressed, and made the targets of hostility, the ways older people are treated in the same way, and the ways younger people are mistrusted.

Questions and tasks:

Read Morrison's Nobel Prize speech and consider the following:

1. What does the speech say about the role of language in society?

2. What does it say about obedience?

3. What is a "dead language"?

4. In what ways is language manipulated and for what purpose?

5. What is the role of literature and the writer?

6. Explain Morrison's words "Word work is sublime."

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GLOSSARY

Amanuensis – a person who provided written accounts of orally narrated stories of black life in slavery. Some amanuensis completely reconstructed the life story of a formerly enslaved person; most proclaimed the narrative to be a faithful description of the black narrator's story.

Antebellum (era) – typically refers to the years 1840-1865 in U.S. history.

Bildungsroman – a "novel of formation" or "novel of education"; it traces the protagonist's emotional or psychological maturation, the development of his or her mind and character in the passage from childhood into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world. In African American autobiography and fiction, the protagonist's life is often shaped by initial experiences with racism, white supremacy, or other forces that seek to inhibit black self-actualization.

Black Power – a late 1960s revolutionary movement that promoted black self-determination through its call for African Americans to revolt against racialized discrimination and white supremacy with insurgency and violence.

The Blues – a form of indigenous African American music originating from musical traditions maintained by enslaved Africans during the early modern slave trade. Contemporary blues forms were derived from rhythmic chanting of enslaved field workers, who developed a variety of forms of black expressivity with a focus in blues on painful emotions. The blues, like black sacred music traditions, have informed decades of African American ballads, sermons, and dance modes. The classic blues chorus is formed in a minor chord and distinguished by a stylized three-line stanza of repetition, sorrow, and signifying. Such colloquialisms as "feeling blue" or "I gots the blues" intimate a range of feelings from melancholy and injustice to love and sexual pleasure.

Call and response – an oral musical pattern of West African origin in which a leader sings or speaks and is followed by the response of a related group; the response may echo fragments of the leader's structure or words.

Civil Rights Movement – (in the US) the national campaign by African Americans for equal rights in the 1950s and 1960s. It advocated nonviolent social change activism.

Cult of True Womanhood – a construct developed by literary critic Barbara Welter in 1961, to assert that 19th c. wealthy and middle-class Anglo-American women were expected to pursue and maintain a code of female conduct based on chastity, piety, domesticity, submissiveness to patriarchal authority, and dependence on male superiority. This code of honor placed white women on a pedestal, while consigning black women to a life of sexual exploitation.

Diaspora (African) – the movement of Africans to diverse geographical locations beyond the borders of Africa. Most of the African diaspora is descended from people who were enslaved and shipped to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slaver trade; the dispersion and displacement of the people as well as their ethnic customs, cultural folkways, and other sources of national identity.

Double consciousness – a concept developed by W.E.B. Du Bois in his essay "Strivings of the Negro People," first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897. Later, in his influential 1903 study *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois characterized this identity conflict as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," as an internal struggle in which a black person "ever feels his two-ness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

Fugitive slave – generally refers to an enslaved person who escaped from slavery in the antebellum period; one who fled from the antebellum South to nominal freedom in the U.S. North or Canada. It is often used interchangeably with "ex-slave."

Great Migration – in the postbellum era, a movement of millions of freed blacks from the rural American South to urban northern centers in search of employment and wages, improved living conditions and access to free or affordable education. The Great Migration refers to the first wave of mass migration from 1915-1940, and is considered one of the largest American internal migrations to date. After Emancipation, many southern blacks fled

lynching and legalized segregation and settled in Harlem in New York City, which became the headquarters of a number of significant African American political organizations.

Integrationist – a person of color with a positive vision of assimilation into hegemonic, mainstream society as a cultural or ethnic ideal.

Jazz – improvised combination of several traditions of African American music and musical types, including blues ragtime, brass band music, and dance music. It was created in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Orleans.

Jezebel – from the era of antebellum slavery, a stereotype of enslaved black women; based loosely on the biblical Jezebel and said to be ruled by the libido and thus to act primarily on a natural impulse of sexual promiscuity; a shameless or scheming woman.

Ku-Klux-Klan (KKK) - a secret US organization of Protestant white men who are opposed to equal rights for people of other races or religions. It was particularly violent towards black people during the Civil Rights protests of the 1960s, showing little or no regard for the law.

Lynching – acts of violence committed against black communities in the U.S. to advance white supremacy and squelch black revolutionary power; mob murders, usually of African American male victims, alleged to have raped white women or committed other crime, particularly prevalent in the U.S. South, 1880-1930. Lynching was usually performed by hanging, without a legal trial.

Middle Passage – the journey across the Atlantic by ship as part of the slave trade. Ships traveled from Britain to Africa, were the slaves were bought and then taken to be sold in America or the West Indies. It occurred from the early 1500s to the early 1800s. Millions of Africans died at sea from disease, torture, starvation, and other atrocities in the Middle Passage.

Negritude – an artistic movement comprised primarily of early twentieth-century Francophone black writers in the African diaspora and characterized by a distinctly African aesthetic, a rejection of colonization, and an emphasis on African solidarity and aesthetics.

Negro spirituals – a set of religious songs which reflect a broad range of emotional tones and values espoused by black people in bondage in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. They are characterized by expressions of Christian piety, hope, despair, and joy.

Passing (for white) – describes the phenomenon of a person of black identity presenting a nonblack identity to avoid racial segregation for brief or longer periods of time; sometimes it seeks to subvert racism, sometimes to endorse whiteness and white ideology.

Piccaninny – (*now* taboo) a slang word which refers to a racist and derogatory caricature of a small child of a black-skinned race.

Postbellum (era) – typically refers to the years 1865-1890, the period after the Civil War that encompasses Reconstruction in U.S. history.

Sambo – (derogatory) a black man (from a story about a little boy called Sambo who ate a lot of pancakes).

Signifying – a theory of reading African American expressive arts developed by Gates in the 1980s. A figurative informal expression of speech found in black vernacular forms of communication, incorporating such rhetorical structures and rituals as repetition, mockery, intertextuality, sarcasm satire, irony and improvisation; African American literary deployment of one or more of these forms of verbal expression.

Tuskegee Institute – one of the first colleges for black people in the US. It was started by Booker T. Washington in 1881, Alabama.

Uncle Tom – eponymous protagonist of 1850 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe; eventually, an insult connoting submissive African American behavior and individual or collective sacrifice of black people, their values and / or cultural codes.

Underground Railroad – a secret system in the US before the antebellum era for helping thousands of slaves to escape to the free northern states or Canada. The slaves were called "passengers," the people who helped them - "conductors," and the slaves hid in "stations" (safe houses) along the way.

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Mokymo priemonė „Afroamerikiečių literatūros tradicija“ yra skirta anglų filologijos studentams kaip bendro amerikiečių literatūros kurso dalis. Šioje priemonėje brėžiamos pagrindinės Amerikos juodaodžių literatūros tradicijos gairės – vergų naratyvų tradicija, Harlemo Renesanso laikotarpis, pilietinių teisių judėjimo atšvaitai literatūroje ir mene, postmodernizmo ir jam būdingų tradicinių vergų naratyvų transformacijų bruožai. Taip pat apžvelgiama šiuolaikinių afroamerikiečių moterų literatūra, laužanti tradicinius juodaodžių, ypač moterų, vaizdavimo literatūroje stereotipus. Literatūros srovės ir sąjūdžiai bei jų iškiliausi atstovai ir kūriniai pristatomi jų istoriniuose ir kultūriniuose kontekstuose. Pateikta medžiaga ne tik supažindins studentus su analizuojama tradicija, bet ir padės jiems suvokti afroamerikiečių literatūrą ir kultūrą, kaip neatsiejamą bendros amerikiečių literatūros ir kultūros dalį. Po kiekvieno skyriaus pateikiama praktinių užduočių bei rekomenduojama literatūra, nurodanti aspektus, ties kuriais reikėtų susitelkti, studijuojant afroamerikiečių literatūrą.

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