A Richard Wright Bibliography Supplement

by

Keneth Kinnamon
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A RICHARD WRIGHT BIBLIOGRAPHY: 1986

by

Keneth Kinnamon

Highlighted by Joyce A. Joyce's Richard Wright's Art of Tragedy and the special Callaloo issue edited by Maryemma Graham, 1986 was an extraordinary year for Wright studies. Joyce's emphasis is on Wright's artistry in achieving a tragic effect in Native Son. This book belongs on the required reading list of anyone with a serious interest in our author. The same can be said of Graham's rich collection of some of the best papers delivered at the Mississippi symposium in 1985. Especially distinguished are Robert Bone on Wright and the "Chicago Renaissance"; Thadious Davis's comparison of Wright to that other great Mississippi novelist, William Faulkner; Miriam DeCosta-Willis's classification of black women characters in Wright's fiction; Donald B. Gibson's careful analysis of the first chapter of Black Boy; James Miller's Bakhtinian approach to Native Son; John Reilly's exploration of the relation of history to autobiography in The Color Curtain; and Jerry Ward's thoughtful assessment of past and future Wright scholarship.

Notable articles also appeared elsewhere: William Burrison, Yoshinobu Hakutani, and Arnold Rampersad on Lawd Today; Robert Butler, Tony Magistrale, and Louis Tremaine on Native Son; Jacob Howland and Keneth Kinnamon on Black Boy; Dasha Nisula on The Outsider; and John Loftis on "The Man Who Was Almost a Man." At the end of the year the new film version of Native Son was released, occasioning a spate of reviews, mostly unfavorable. Finally, Frank E. Smith's publication of a 1937 letter from Wright to Dale Mullen, editor of a literary magazine in Oxford, Mississippi, reminds us of how acutely needed is a collection of Wright's correspondence.


5. Anon. "Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane." The Nation, 242 (3 May), 623. Advertisement claiming that "if Richard Wright had grown up in South Africa, this is the book he would have written."


Notes coverage in Black Orpheus of the W-Césaire debate and comments on Ulli Beier's discussion in the same magazine of BB and BP.


California Press, pp. 25, 26. Notes coverage in Black Orpheus of the W-Césaire debate and comments on Ulli Beier's discussion in the same magazine of BB and BP.

Whereas the Harlem Renaissance looked back to folklore and the Southern past, the Chicago group, under W, looked toward the urban future and existential freedom.
Shange's poem "Take the A Train."


Van Vechten and Stein comment extensively on W from March 1945 to Stein's death sixteen months later. Both express admiration for W and his work, Stein saying of UTC that "I'm mad about it, there is a tremendous mastery in the thing" (p. 789). By late June of 1946, however, Stein is expressing reservations because W "does not seem to me very Negro" (p. 827).


Lists two items on W (p. 263).


Notes dissertations treating W by Richard Lehan (p. 217), Cynthia Janis Smith (p. 244), Esther Alexander Terry (p. 245), Ramon Kumar Singh (p. 245), and Evelyn Gross Avery (p. 245).


After reviewing criticism of the novel, Burrison analyzes its comic pattern of fool/trickster. W uses colors (especially green), numbers (especially three), and objects as devices to enhance this pattern. The novel is structurally sound, balancing comic and tragic elements.


Far from being gratuitous, violence in W's novel is carefully controlled to express Bigger's personality split between romantic aspiration and naturalistic entrapment. His relation to Mary reveals the first, his relation to Bessie the second. In killing them, he is also destroying two aspects of himself. In Book Three he strives to transcend both "shallow romanticism" and "confining naturalism" so as to achieve wholeness, but the final scene shows that he falls short.


Favorable review of Michel Fabre's The World of Richard Wright.


Mixed review criticizing the film's softening of the novel, but praising most of the performances. The residual power testifies "to the headlong simplicity and mysterious durability of Wright's classic" as well as to the screenplay.

30. Chametzky, Jules. Our Decentralized Literature: Cultural Meditations in Selected Jewish and
Mentions W briefly.

Mentions briefly W and NS (p. 675).

Sketches W's life, focusing on NS. Colter recalls seeing W in Chicago in 1936, then meeting him in 1941 and attending with him and others a Marian Anderson concert. Describes W's dress, demeanor, and appearance, thinking "can this urbane, agreeable personage ... be the man who created that native son and archetype Bigger Thomas?"

Mentions W briefly (p. 29).

Contrasts W and Thomas Wolfe.
Sketches W's career, mentioning BB and most of the fiction.

Reprint of 1966.42.


Argues that power is the main issue between men and women in W's fiction. "Women's power can result from either their independence or dependence" (p. 82), and both threaten male independence. So threatened, W's male characters lash back, often violently.

37. Davis, Thadious M. "Wright, Faulkner, and Mississippi as Racial Memory." Callaloo, 9 (Summer), 469-478.
Relates W and Faulkner to the social and historical context of their native state, which they must reconstitute imaginatively and then transcend. Faulkner must come to terms with the past and a closed society, even while criticizing them. W could achieve his human potential only by rejecting the state's past with its racism and oppression. But both were indelibly marked by Mississippi.

Discusses the relation of Baldwin and Himes to W. Notes that Himes considered SH W's best novel "because its characters seemed real and they were absurd" (p. 92).

Examines W's black women characters not as realistic representations, but as "the dark side of a Southern womanhood that has been violated and distorted in the crucible of racism and
sexism" (p. 548). So considered, they fall into the categories of the Mother Avenger (Aunt Sue), the Mother Sufferer (W’s own mother and Lulu), and the Earth Mother (Sarah).


Notes that Ginn removed "the first and fifth stanzas from Richard Wright’s "Hokku poems" (p. 38).


Quotes from BB (pp. 113-114).


Points out that W’s appeal to Third World intellectuals resides in "his concept of power and its implications for those who are marginal members of society" (p. 481). Like Foucault, W understood the "need for subverting the dominant cultural discourse so as to create a more satisfying human one" (p. 483). In this context Dissanayake comments on NS and BR as well as BP, CC, and WML.


Mentions W briefly.


Mentions W briefly (p. 168).

45. ______. "Guest Editor’s Note: First Catch." Cottonwood, 38/39 (Summer/Fall), 7-9.

Mentions W briefly.


Quotes briefly from BB (p. 429).


Reprint of 1974


Reprint of 1984.47.


Reprint of 1967.29.


Emphasizes W’s use of the device of enclosure in developing his existential theme. He is indebted to Poe in this respect.


Review noting Cooke’s treatment of W.
52. Estes, David C. "An Interview with James Baldwin." New Orleans Review, 13 (Fall), 59-64.


   Briefly compares Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night (p. 1101) and Ezekiel Mphahlele’s Down Second Avenue to BB (pp. 1104-1105).

55. ___. "Richard Wright’s Native Son and Ousmane Sembène’s [sic] Le Docker Noir." Komparatische Hefte, 14, 103-116.
   Although Le Docker Noir has been compared to Claude McKay’s Banjo, it is much more similar to NS. Feuser discusses similarities in theme (alienation, exploitation), structure (point of view, time, space, action), style, characterization, and world-view. NS had a profound effect on Sembène Ousmane’s novel.


59. Gallantz, Michael. Richard Wright’s Native Son & Black Boy. Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron’s Educational Series, x + 134 pp. Study guide to the two works including plot summaries, character analysis, discussion of themes and style, biographical background, sample test and answers, topics for writing, a brief bibliography, and four quotations from critics.

60. Garrow, David J. Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. New York: William Morrow, p. 113. Mentions King’s meeting with W.


Revised reprint of 1980


Mentions W briefly (p. 336).


Mentions briefly W's correspondence (p. 1018).

65. Gibson, Donald B. "Richard Wright's Black Boy and the Trauma of Autobiographical Rebirth." Callaloo, 9 (Summer), 492-498.

Analyzes the first chapter of BB to show how it is arranged to emphasize parental rejection and failure. The result is the early development of self-reliance in W. His individualism allowed him to resist authority—parental, social, racial, or other.


Notes Kodama's treatment of W (p. 89).


Mentions briefly the film NS.


Introducing a special W issue deriving from the November 1985 symposium at the University of Mississippi, Graham emphasizes the need for new critical approaches that examine "aesthetic concerns within the context of the social and political realities that shaped Wright's world and being" (p. 439).


Mentions W briefly (p. 332).


Lists eleven items s.v. W.


Three topics following "The Man Who Was Almost a Man."


Brief biographical headnote to "The Man Who Was Almost a Man."


Maintains that LT fails as a naturalistic novel because it does not develop the tensions between social determinism and individual will. It is more successful as a satire on the average man, black or white. Irony is the predominant mode of Wright's satire. The effort to combine naturalism and satire fails, however.
Consists of 134 items, "all of the critical books and articles of substance on Richard Wright published in Japan through 1984." The introductory paragraphs (pp. 27-29) trace W's reputation in Japan.

Discusses producer Diane Silver's omission of Bessie's murder in the film NS over the objection of director Jerrold Freedman. Quotes comments by Richard Yarborough and Arnold Rampersad on the importance of the novel and by Valerie Smith on W's unfavorable portrayal of black women, as well as comments by Silver, Freedman, and Lindsay Law on the film.

Mentions briefly NS.

Mentions briefly W, BB, and NS (pp. 158-159).

Explains NS as exemplifying both the "Samson Syndrome" of self-destruction and a "Sartrian nihilism."

Includes discussion of the reworking of racial confrontation in NS and "Big Boy Leaves Home" by Walker in her novel.

Review of both film versions of NS. The first "is a documentary of a novelist trapped in his own myth." The second is poorly directed and badly acted.
Hoberman also comments on the novel NS: "A product of '30s political culture that looks forward to the turmoil of the '60s, a philosophical tract with lurid tabloid immediacy, and a Dreiserian expose that anticipates French existentialism, Native Son takes the 'proletarian realism' of its era into a hallucinatory realm."
Reprinted: 1987

81. Hodges, John O. "'Wondering About the Art of a Wanderer': Langston Hughes and His Critics." The Langston Hughes Review, 5 (Fall), 19-23.
Mentions briefly NS and BB (p. 19).

Discusses W as an integrationist writer, quoting from "The Literature of the Negro in the United States," noting his treatment in Arthur P. Davis's From the Dark Tower and Robert Stepto's From Behind the Veil,
and contrasting the favorable reception of NS to the unfavorable reception of Their Eyes Were Watching God.


87. Howland, Jacob. "Black Boy: A Story of Soul-Making and a Quest for the Real." Phylon, 47 (June), 117-127. "In the first part ... I try to set forth the general character and significance of the quest which gives Black Boy its special form, and which I describe as a quest for the real. In the second part, I attempt to state how Black Boy displays the development of Wright’s soul and the nature of his own specifically artistic quest" (p. 117). Howland analyzes at length the opening scene, stressing the metaphor of fire.


91. Jackson, Richard L. "The Human Legacy of Black Latin-American Literature." CLA Journal, 30 (December), 154-170. One of four epigraphs is a quotation from the end of AH. In the essay Jackson cites Julius Lester on NS.

93. Johnson, Joe. "Books." The Crisis, 93 (February), 12-13, 64.
Review of James Baldwin's The Price of the Ticket mentioning briefly W, NS, and Bigger Thomas.

94. ______. "Books." The Crisis, 93 (March), 14-15, 48.
Includes a review of James Baldwin's The Evidence of Things Not Seen comparing Wayne Williams, convicted of killing children in Atlanta, to Bigger Thomas.

Discusses and quotes from "Blueprint for Negro Writing" before commenting on dissent from W's position by Ellison and Baldwin. Mentions NS and BB.

96. ______. "Going to the Territory By Ralph Ellison." The Crisis, 93 (December), 10-11.
Review discussing the Ellison-W relationship and commenting on "Blueprint for Negro Writing."

Mentions W in several items and includes items on Michel Fabre's biography and Jane M. Davis's dissertation.

Taking issue with biographical, social, naturalistic, and existential interpretations of W, Joyce stresses his artistry in developing NS as a tragedy. Her concluding paragraph summarizes her argument: "The structure of the novel (the arrangement of parts that result in the ironic reversal of roles between Bigger and Max), Bigger's ambiguous personality, and the paradoxical nature of the image patterns all function integrally as a well-orchestrated discord that becomes harmonized in Bigger's suffering as his consciousness grows. The complexity of Wright's symphonic characterization of Bigger reaches a crescendo in the rhythmical repetition and interlocking relationship between the sentence patterns, the colors black, white, and yellow, the image of the wall, and the metaphors of the snow, the sun, and blindness. The polarity expressed in these weblike linguistic chords synthesized in Max's speech captures the tension in Bigger's psyche, a tension that evokes the awe and power responsible for the success and lastingness of Native Son" (pp. 119-120).

Review mentioning W briefly.

100. Kart, Larry. "To Play Bigger, Love Belies His Name." Chicago Tribune (22 December), Sec. 5, p. 3.
Article on the actor in the film NS. Love interprets Bigger's personality and background,
contrasting them to his own.
Notes a conflict between the producer and director: "Silver wanting to portray Bigger Thomas in relatively sympathetic terms, while [Jerrold] Freedman hoped to retain the brutality of Wright's original vision." Love notes that the murder of Bessie was filmed but subsequently cut.

Mentions W briefly.

102. Kehr, Dave. "'Native Son' Absurd Rendering of Famous Book." Chicago Tribune (26 December), Sec. 7, pp. A, H, L.
Extremely unfavorable review of the film NS. Praises Victor Love's acting as Bigger, but pans all other aspects of the production. The film dilutes W's rage, resulting in "a dim weepie" (p. L).
Reprinted: 1987

Compares BB and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings "to ascertain how gender may affect genre in these two autobiographical quests for freedom and literacy and, in Angelou's case, community as well" (p. 123). Numerous similarities, both general and specific, are revealed. The difference is in the treatment of childhood episodes: W emphasizes white racism and the hostility of his own family; Angelou shows the same racism at work, but treats respectfully black cultural patterns designed to survive it.
Reprinted: 1995

Includes a brief note on W.

Seven suggestions to accompany an excerpt from "The Man Who Saw the Flood."

Mentions briefly NS (p. 55).

107. Lara, Oruno D. "La rive noire: de Harlem a la Seine, par Michel Fabre." Présence Africaine, Nos. 137-138 (First and Second Quarter), 262-263.
Review mentioning W briefly.

Mentions briefly "Bright and Morning Star" (p. 7).
Reprinted: 1991

Quotes from a taped conversation with Baldwin commenting on W's relation to young Third World writers in Paris (p. 191).

Relates an anecdote about W talking to a white Frenchman and an African at a Paris café (pp. 128-129).


Lists nineteen items on W in whole or in part.


Partial reprint of 1968


Contrasts W’s story to Faulkner’s hunting story "The Old People" with respect to naming and identity, the relationship of the protagonists to guns, and the presence or absence of a male model. Faulkner’s initiation story is typical of the subgenre, but W parodies the hunt as rite of passage in his story.


Lists eleven items on W and cross-references to nineteen other items partially on W.


Lists all of W’s books through LT except SH.


Abstracts a 1985 Kent State University dissertation. Compares the move from collectivism to individualism in the three writers.


Lists seventeen items on W.


Having read Crime and Punishment a decade before he wrote NS, W used it imaginatively for his own fictional purposes. The theme of crime leading to spiritual growth and plot similarities are obvious, but Magistrale notes also that "Wright’s use of parallel characters, atmospheric effects, and a similar belief in the power of the human spirit to transform itself bear a marked resemblance to Crime and Punishment" (p. 68).

Novel mentioning briefly W, BP (p. 181), and Cross Damon (p. 187).


125. Michaelson, Judith. "Wright’s Daughter Approves." Los Angeles Times (24 December), pp. 1, 3. Interview with Julia Wright on both versions of the film NS. The original version was a failure, but the Diane Silver production is "honest" and Victor Love’s portrayal of Bigger is excellent. Julia Wright also speaks of "a Columbia Pictures project several years ago [that] ... fell through."

126. Miller, James A. "Bigger Thomas’s Quest for Voice and Audience in Richard Wright’s Native Son." Callaloo, 9 (Summer), 501-506. Taking issue with critics who believe that Max is an authorial spokesman and that Bigger is inarticulate, Miller uses Bakhtinian concepts to argue that Bigger, quite articulate in his own black street environment, must cope with the "authoritative discourse" of the white world to achieve voice and audience. In doing so he repudiates Max as well as white racists, ending in isolation, "a soloist listening to the sound of his own song."

127. ____. "'I Investigate the Sun': Amiri Baraka in the 1980s." Callaloo, 9 (Winter), 184-192. Mentions W briefly (p. 188).


Castle of My Skin (p. 270).

131. Murphy, A. D. "Native Son (Color)." Variety (17 December), p. 20.
Unfavorable review of "a corny adaptation" of the novel. Includes credits and cast for the play NS and the first film version as well as this one.


133. Onoge, Omafume F. "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature: A Survey (1974)," in Marxism and African Literature. Ed. Georg M. Gugelberger. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, pp. 21-49. Claims that "we can speculate with some confidence that had the later Richard Wright lived long enough to write a blueprint for African literature in our contemporary epoch, the uneasy tension between race and class which runs as an undercurrent in his 1937 Blueprint for Negro Literature would have been overcome" (p. 43). In an endnote Onoge elaborates the point (p. 48).


145. Reardon, Patrick. "'Native Son': New Film's Racial Message as Valid Today as in 1949 [sic]." Chicago Tribune (10 April), Sec. 5, pp. 1, 3. Emphasizes continuing relevance of the work. Includes plot summary, quotations from the novel, and comments of the film writer, Richard Wesly, and producer, Diane Silver.


148. Reilly, John M. "Richard Wright and the Art of Non-Fiction: Stepping Out on the Stage of the World." Callaloo, 9 (Summer), 507-520. Interprets CC as an autobiographical reading of history. From the disillusion and despair expressed in Q, W turned to emerging African and Asian nations as the "compelling subject" needed "to restore optimism of will" (p. 510), allowing him to speak as an intellectual voice and agent of contemporary history. Interpreting the Bundung Conference, he developed a paradigm of history as consciousness, his own consciousness and experience providing the key to understanding his alter egos, the Westernized leaders of the Third World. Reprinted: 1993


150. Rollins, Judith. "Part of a Whole: The Interdependence of the Civil Rights Movement and Other Social Movements." Phylon, 47 (Spring), 61-70. Comments on W's response to the Bandung Conference and quotes
from CC (pp. 63-64).

Contains ten items on W with cross-references to six others.

Contains entries on W and NS. Mentions W in entries on Ralph Ellison and John A. Williams.

Quotes Genet mentioning W (p. 279).

Reports that Harper & Row has printed 150,000 copies of the paperback NS to accompany the release of the film. "Since buying the rights to 'Native Son' 20 years ago, Harper & Row's Perennial Library imprint has sold 1.6 million copies."

Abstracts a 1986 University of Michigan dissertation. W is one of the four.

Contains a letter dated 19 June 1937 from W to Mullen, editor of a new magazine, River, published in Oxford, Mississippi. W discusses his own short stories, Challenge, and the possibility of publishing black writers in white literary magazines in the South. W mentions that he is reading Absalom, Absalom!.

Mentions W briefly (p. 57).

Mentions Wright's relation to sociology and his Christian symbolism. Quotes from "Transcontinental" on Amerindians.

Mentions W briefly (p. 257).

160. ______. "'Never Was Born': The Mulatto, an American Tragedy?" The Massachusetts Review, 28 (Summer), 293-316.
Mentions briefly NS (p. 306).

Nine questions and three
suggestions to accompany an excerpt from BB.


167. Swindell, Warren C. "The Role of Criticism in Black Popular Culture." The Western Journal of Black Studies, 10 (Winter), 185-192. Mentions the F.B.I. report that W "was obsessed with solving the problems of Black people," adding that "this is the type of Black writer needed by Blacks" (p. 191).


169. Thomas, Kevin. "Movie Review: A Prodigal 'Native Son' Returns." Los Angeles Times (24 December), Part VI, pp. 1, 3. Unfavorable review complaining that the film makes "a molehill out of a mountain," lacking as it does "the raw tragic power of the novel." It starts well but becomes plodding and predictable. The acting is good, however, especially Victor Love's as Bigger. Reprinted: 1987


171. Tremaine, Louis. "The Dissociated Sensibility of Bigger Thomas in Wright's Native Son." Studies in American Fiction, 14 (Spring), 63-76. Argues that Bigger's basic problem is a "conflict between experience and expression" (p. 64) that prevents understanding of his emotions by himself or
others. He wants to know the meaning of his life, but is afraid of that knowledge. He wants to communicate his real self to others, but fear causes him to dissemble instead. Tremaine analyzes character, plot, and narrative voice to show how they work expressionistically, not naturalistically, to express Bigger's sensibility.

    Mentions W briefly.

    Favorable review praising the performances of Victor Love as Bigger and Oprah Winfrey as his mother.

    Mentions W briefly.
    Reprinted: 1990

    Discusses the past and future of W criticism and scholarship. Using reviews of UTC by Granville Hicks, Sterling Brown, and John Lovell as examples, Ward shows how current critical patterns continue earlier trends. Also notes recent books by Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates as evidence that poststructuralist criticism is compatible with black cultural imperatives.

    Mentions W briefly.

    Mentions briefly Bigger Thomas.

    Discusses Reed's use in The Last Days of Louisiana Red of W's use of Poe in NS, quoting from "How 'Bigger' Was Born."

    Review mentioning W as expatriate and "Big Black Good Man."

    Includes comparison of Welty's book of photographs with TMBV and James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

181. Williams, John A. "The Use of Communications Media in Four Novels by Richard Wright." Callaloo, 9 (Summer), 529-539.
    Catalogs W's use of media,
especially newspapers, in *LT*, *NS*, *Q*, and *LD*.
