

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM AND THE FUTURE OF BLACK
LITERARY THEORY

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Abstract

The future of the literary theories of Black Africa and the Black Diaspora lies in Africa's distant past. It lies in the discourses of origination, and in ontology that conceived subjectivity in significantly different terms from Hegelianism, Cartesianism, postmodernism, and Derridian deconstruction, for example. There is an ongoing crisis in Black critical theory regarding the parameters within which it should be articulated in order to remain responsive to its distinct historical consciousness. It is a twentieth-century problem, carried into the twenty-first, and it is mainly a crisis in philosophic discourse. This crisis of articulation is mainly a legacy of Western epistemological and political hegemony, and puts Black critical theory in the paradoxical position of being embedded in the very epistemological modality it seeks to overcome. In order for the crisis to be clearly seen as a philosophical one, a new Black subjective agency must emerge to elucidate the partiality of Western historiography, recast the history of philosophy, and formulate a more adequate metaphysics and art-theory. Such a theory will, for example, point out that the often nihilist horizon of subjectivity proffered by postmodernism is, in significant ways, inimical to the formulation or representation of this new Black subjectivity.

For the first time in critical theory, the Black subject can see itself whole. It can now tell its story from the emergence of the first humans in Africa to the present, as a relatively unbroken continuum. The epistemological conditions for the emergence of a new Black subjectivity have never been better than in what I tentatively call the Dakar-Brazzaville-Stanford 'Conversation' (DBSC) about Black Africa and ancient Egypt. The DBSC stands for a number of major Black scholars (Cheikh Anta Diop, Théophile Obenga, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and St. Clair Drake) in those parts of the world, and the common denominator I identify in their historical, anthropological, and philosophic theorisations of Africa. My aim is to extend the 'conversation' by examining what it means for literary theory. The extent of Western historiography's misrepresentation of Africa's significance in civilisation is only now being openly acknowledged in Western intellectual discourse. It is, ultimately, a problematic that has to do with the status of language in relation to truth and history and, at a deeper level, embraces the ontological status of writing. African and Black foundational, philosophic, historical, and literary texts, shaped by particular systems of signs that are a clue to the African and Black mental worlds, require a particular kind of reading. Therefore, as part of the effort to represent Africa more adequately, a shift of perspective and form now enables Black fiction and literary theory to posit an alternative understanding of the idea and history of literature itself. And this involves recovering and redeploying ancient Egypt in its connection to Black Africa.

Though there is increasing evidence in world scholarship that the first inhabitants of ancient Egypt were a negroid people, that their mystical beliefs laid the foundation for ancient Egyptian civilisation, and that philosophic speculation is, ultimately, Egyptian in origin, I do not know of any study that has systematically teased out the consequences of this flourishing scholarship for Black literary theory. The ultimate purpose of my thesis, therefore, is to deconstruct two figures (Hegel and Derrida) who have cast a shadow on Black literary theory. I do this by re-reading and, especially, re-contextualising them, to show that their philosophies are ancient Egyptian in origin. As a result of this re-

historicisation, I argue that Black African and ancient Egyptian philosophies remain the most viable paradigms within which Black literary theory has a bright future. But it is a future that re-replaces Hegelian and Derridian philosophies in their originary Egyptian contexts in order to pare them of the unhelpful accretions Hegel and Derrida brought to them.

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Introduction

The future of Black literary theory lies in Africa's distant past. It lies in the discourses of origination, and in ontology that conceived subjectivity in significantly different terms from Cartesianism, postmodernism, and Derridian deconstruction, for example. The current crisis in Black critical theory regarding the parameters within which it should be articulated in order for it to remain responsive to its distinct historical consciousness, is a twentieth-century problem being carried over into the twenty-first; and it is mainly a crisis in philosophic discourse. This crisis in the representation of Blackness and the prognostication of future trends in Black literary theory is mainly a legacy of Western epistemological and political hegemony, and puts Black critical theory in the paradoxical position of being embedded in the very epistemological modality it seeks to overcome. In order for the crisis to be clearly seen as a philosophic one, a new Black subjective agency must emerge to elucidate the partiality of Western historiography, recast the history of philosophy, and formulate a more adequate metaphysics and art-theory. Such a theory will, for example, point out that the essentially nihilist horizon of subjectivity proffered by postmodernism is in significant ways inimical to the formulation or representation of this new subjectivity; and that even where ethnic double-consciousness regulates critical theory, as is indeed the case in much of the Black tradition, this ought not to mean the self-negation that some postmodernist or open-ended hybridist equivocations on race tend to suggest.¹ The epistemological conditions for the emergence of a new Black subjectivity have never been better than in the Dakar-Brazzaville-Stanford Conversation (DBSC) about Black Africa and ancient Egypt. What I loosely refer to as the Dakar-Brazzaville-Stanford

Conversation mainly refers to the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop, the other Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Congolese (from what was formerly known as Congo-Brazzaville) Théophile Obenga, the African-American St. Clair Drake, and the conversation one can establish between them on the Black Africa-ancient Egypt debate. The extent of Western historiography's misrepresentation of Africa's significance in civilisation is only now being openly acknowledged in Western intellectual discourse. It is, ultimately, a problematic that has a lot to do with the status of language in relation to truth and history and, at a deeper level, embraces the ontological status of Writing. African and Black foundational, philosophic, historical, and literary texts, shaped by particular systems of signs that are clues to the African and Black mental world(s), require a particular kind of reading. Such a reading is part of the bigger effort to understand or represent Africa more adequately. With the DBSC, a shift in perspective and form now enables Black fiction and literary theory to posit an alternative 'emplotment' of the idea and history of literature itself. It is an alternative account of the emergence of Writing, then of the birth of Literature, its first/foundational texts, the story of its evolution, which phases or elements are officialised or omitted, and which cultures are deemed to have played an important role and which ones are thought inconsequential; an account made possible only through the recovery and redeployment of ancient Egypt and its connection to Black Africa.

After two millennia of the West's obsession with power and colonisation, and its manipulation of history, religion, and philosophy through the invention of a series of Others, a crisis in perception and philosophy has now set in. As a result, such formerly occluded or discredited notions as "spirituality," "emotion," "mysticism," "occult history," "instability," etc., are now recuperable and can be invested with the status of thought and coherence to renew or enrich philosophic debate. The refamiliarisation or adjustment in perception this development requires leads, in the context of my thesis, to the necessary

and preliminary observation that Africa is a contested referent: there is the fierce local nationalist's and the foreign obscurantist's narrowly represented Africa, and there is the artist's or philosopher's Africa whose full meaning requires a much broader perspective on History and Truth. Somewhere between these two poles hovers the future of Black literary theory. Given the current fierce debate on what constitutes Blackness, I would like to specify and delimit, as a very necessary methodological precaution, my working idea of Black literary theory. It refers to the theory that has as its object of study the literature of the Black world that still sees (Black) Africa and (Black) African continuities in the diaspora as viable, fundamental paradigms from which to elicit a sense of self that is the basis for traditional and modern modes of existence. As we will see, Michael Echeruo and Toni Morrison, among others, provide testimonies to the feasibility of this identitarian project. Such an idea of self is not at all a manifesto that demands the allegiance of those who do not feel they should designate themselves as Black.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's deconstruction of the concept of race, particularly in "Illusions of Race" and, generally, in *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, is one of the first close, postmodernist, examinations of this concept, and can be usefully seen as characteristic of a plural theoretic, mid- to late twentieth-century, period during which a multiplicity of theories – deconstruction and postmodernism in particular – deprived (or tried to deprive) minority philosophies and literatures (Black, feminist, aboriginal, etc.) of a number of stabilising concepts. Though on scientific grounds Appiah makes a sensible case for the interrogation of "race", other critics have offered equally compelling ontological and socio-political arguments as to why Western High Theory's assault on such linchpins as truth, history, race, etc., if uncritically endorsed, can turn out to be a trap, set by a High Theory that is bent more on wantonly weakening race-based discourses than on candidly working towards an honest plurality of theories leading to genuine parity of identities. This debate is one in a string of crises of identity

and representation that Black critical theory has known. In his response to Appiah, entitled "Caliban's Triple Play," (381-395) Houston Baker frames the debate in terms of an inside and an outside, and expresses sadness at the realisation that Appiah has been surrounded by High Theory simulacra for too long to be able to appreciate the concrete and sad reality of race in everyday (American) life (385). Baker sees a cynical game unfolding, "a deceptive show filled with tricky mirrors", a catchy 'aberration' of our postmodernist time that has 'afflicted' Appiah's ability to distinguish between 'responsible' and 'sterile' academic eloquence.

It is precisely this perception of the deracialisation of the concept of race as a bait placed by Appiah's Western "overseers" (Baker, 380) that other Black theorists have focussed on. In his own response to the crisis of representing the Black subject in philosophy, Charles W. Mills writes in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*:

Many white liberals (and, indeed, historically many white Marxists also), aware of the verdict of science on race, are puzzled at black intellectuals' retention of race as a significant social category; they wish to move from the falsity of racial realism to global claims about the unreality of race in general and the corollary political mistakenness of race-centered political discourse such as one finds in black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentrism. But part of the point of my taxonomy of metaphysical positions is to show that there is a conceptual room for a view of race as both real and unreal, not "realist" but still objectivist. This position is *racial constructivism*. (47)

The combined effect of Appiah's essay and book, and Gates's book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, especially the chapter on Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, read by some as Gates's endorsement of a gratuitous decentering of the Black subject, is seen by them as a hasty unwriting of essentialism and a derealisation of Blackness. Regarding how Africa is appropriated by the practitioners of textualism, Michael Echeruo's defence of an African ontology in a section of "An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project" (8-9) emerges from an awareness of how transnational postmodernism has engendered a major crisis in

African (and Black) humanities. He focusses on Africa to illustrate the transnational character or effect of postmodernism and deconstruction. He does this, in order to draw attention to what he perceives as the unsettling practice whereby diasporic Black liberals (mainly Paul Gilroy) at times, indirectly through how they situate themselves in the African retentions/Blackness debate, enforce on Africa modes of (self-)representation inculcated by Western High Theory. Echeruo acknowledges the desirability and inevitability of theoretic pluralism -- and Africans (and other Blacks) did not have to wait for poststructuralism to come along and show them its intellectual necessity -- yet, he deplores the premature liquidation of an African ontology and subject-position. Derek Walcott discusses a related aspect of the issue: opportunistic criticism in white liberalism and in a mode of discourse that is characteristic of Afrocentricity:

The liberal warms to the speech of the ghetto in a way quite contemptible to the poet, for the benignity of the liberal critic perpetuates the sociological conditions of that speech, despite his access to anger. What he really preaches again, but this time through criticism, is the old separate-but-equal argument. Blacks are different, and the pathos is that most blacks have been led to believe this, and into the tragedy of proclaiming their difference. The theories clash, for the radical seeks to equate the deprived up to the status of the privileged, while the liberal and his unconscious accomplices, the poets of the ghetto and of "revolutionary rhetoric," fear to lose "their own thing" if they let thought and education widen by materialist benefits. Often it is the educated and privileged poet who masks his education and privilege behind a fake exoticism of poverty and the pastoral. They write one way and speak another. There has been the treason of clerks, and now we have the treason of the intellectuals (55) ²

But, it is Manthia Diawara's formulation of the Black crisis of representation which rather neatly straddles the vast expanse my thesis tries to cover. In *In Search of Africa*, he offers the following observation on the current twists and turns of the Black theorist's search for the idea and reality of a continent, his/her inability to perceive daily reality and subjectivity in a coordinated manner. It is, in essence, a stricture on the entire Black critical and theoretic tradition. I will quote him at length:

The dissociation of politics from culture makes me want to be a postcolonial subject who can make a virtue out of living in contradictory spaces, in the here and there at the same time, in the in-between and hybrid spaces—neither African

nor American, and African American at the same time. To be able to say things like, "Africa does not exist," or "Africa is an invention." To be able to make my "creolity" a pure poetic statement, where rootlessness becomes the only grammar. To find the pleasure of the text in Deleuze, Foucault, and Barthes, and to be able to commit myself to denouncing the essentialism of black people everywhere—their retrograde nationalism, sexism, and homophobia. I say hooray to the coalition of progressive forces, for the rainbow children. Césaire says there is no second blackness without an original blackness. But my creolity is anti-essentialist. I prefer the blackness of black British, like Soul II Soul—it is more chic.

But hard as I try, I cannot find peace and satisfaction in living in these contradictory spaces. I feel as if I am being forced to accept an exotic image of myself, to remain nonthreatening to the very logic that made a fixed stereotype out of me. It is like saying: "I cannot understand Africa, but that's alright because it is my postcolonial condition. I see people killed and maimed everyday by the dictator politicians backed by the West, and by multinational corporations, and I celebrate this as globalisation and the postmodern condition. I am an African who cannot understand Africa, so I enter into complicity with a small group of people who say that Africa does not exist anyway."

Or I can try to find a solution to Africa's problems in Afrocentricity, or in nativism. Watch me go all the way back to Egypt, and show how we Soninkes descended from Assouan, where our ancestors were kings and queens—and neglect to add that the reason we came all the way to West Africa was to escape oppression at the hands of those same kings and queens. Watch me take pains to rediscover the Ashanti divinity system, the Sigi ritual as performed by the Dogons, and the meaning of the Orishas among the Yoruba. Never mind that my primary sources are Arabic and Western. I want to use ancient Mali as my antiquity, just as the Europeans use Rome as their antiquity. It is the only way out....

But in my frustration with Africa's failure to catch up with the modern world, I most want to be a conservationist [sic] like Richard Wright, Sekou Touré, Frantz Fanon, and Malcolm X. (218-219)

On the question of the excesses Black critical thought is itself prone to at times, one notes how the Harlem Renaissance petered out, and how Négritude, especially the Senghorian version of it, has fizzled, and may no longer be a truly viable intellectual paradigm. Being fiercely anti-racist and anti-colonial, each of these two movements unfortunately went somewhat too far by trying to control the image of Blackness and Africa, and ended up producing much that was stereotypical, thus confirming the tragedy Walcott speaks of above. The DBSC ushers in a new problematic; one that rethinks the issue of referentiality and the enunciation of subjectivity through the recovery of a number of often unexplored cultural codes that speak the Black self more adequately. It is a new attempt at representation that supplements strictly realist, modernist, and

materialist readings of history and Africa's significance in it with an alternative approach to time, and with a reconceptualisation of language as a vehicle of thought and medium for representing reality. By questioning the modes of representation through which Africa has been projected, the DBSC effects a more thoroughgoing epistemological mutation out of which my thesis will try to tease a corresponding mutation in Black literary theory.

This thesis is, therefore, first about what Black historians, philosophers, scientists, and anthropologists have argued about Africa and ancient Egypt; and, secondly, it is about what I see as the literary applications of their insights. In the arguments I offer and that lead into two final chapters on literary theory, I also refer to comments made by Western theorists and observers (Michael Rice, Michael Hoffman, Paul Ricoeur, Margaret Anne Doody, and others) on the evolution of civilisation and literature which concur to a large extent with the positions taken by Black commentators. In the process, I, naturally, offer a reasonably detailed account of the nature and avowed objectives of the DBSC.

For the first time in critical theory, the Black subjective agency can see itself whole. It can now tell its story from the appearance of the first humans in Africa to the present as a relatively unbroken continuum. As I will try to show, formulating such a continuum will at times require intersecting the mystical and modern dimensions of subjectivity in order to extend the bounds of theoretic endeavour in the near future. The question of memory (or the lack of it) has always dogged Black critical and fictional discourses, arguably more insistently than it has any other literary and theoretic tradition. And so, according to the BDSC, human evolution and the history of philosophy are inseparable coordinates in any serious attempt to understand Black intellectual discourse's difficulties in formulating an identity. At present, Black critical theory can resign itself to the truisms of postmodernist thought, or it can unmask postmodernism --

and even deconstruction -- as ultimately a sophisticated reinscription of Western power that has far-reaching consequences for how various beleaguered minorities are allowed to theorise subjectivity. Further, Black critical theory can initiate a methodological shift whereby there is a material continuity between the augmentation of historical knowledge, a redemptive, non-nihilist phenomenology of consciousness, and a retheorisation of subjectivity in terms of an ethical construal of fictional narrative and critical discourse. To point out the insufficiency of materialist historiography's reductivist representations of Blackness, the DBSC redeploys memory in its conceptual grid. Against the modernist, postmodernist, and deconstructive relativisation or outright obliteration of ideas of origin and ontology, it advocates a diachronic understanding and enlargement of the process of self-apprehension and tries to map out the structure of a new Black ontology, or of a new general humanity *tout court*. Postmodernist and deconstructive thought still hold enough sway to cause any organic theory of history or of subjectivity to be doomed in advance. The process of sorting out the consequences of slavery and colonisation, and the identitarian challenges it poses, are compounded by the pervasive protocols of dominant theories of figuration which thrive on a suspect radical relativism or on a sophisticated form of absolutism that, in the end, do not really recover the various Others as real equals. An enthusiastic and unconditional endorsement of this same Western High Theory is, therefore, far from being proof of sophistication and original thinking.³

The possibility of original thinking may be created instead through the process of relativising postmodernist indeterminacy itself -- for example, by reminding ourselves that modernity and its 'posts' are only very recent developments in the total history/genealogy of human thought. Black memory now clears a path back to the earliest manifestations of humankind's speculations on its cosmic and ethical apprehension of itself in order to elucidate the history of spirituality and of philosophic speculation, with the ultimate purpose of drawing our attention to the questions that

preoccupied originary philosophy. It is a re-perspectivisation of thinking at a time when, to sceptics, High Theory may have outlived its usefulness. In the process of examining this renewal of theory, I, therefore, briefly discuss postmodernism and deconstruction, pointing out their effects (some of it unintended, because not primarily directed at Blackness) on the constitution of a Black identitarian theory. Where Black theorists seem to ally these same schools of thought to their causes -- and there are not too many such instances-- it has been a strategic use only, whereby one sees the necessity of reversing power-relations in discourse. Strategic only, because there is much in them that is incompatible with Black (and Black feminist) agendas. The DBSC discourse enters the philosophical and identitarian debate as a positively humanist intervention which interrogates in radical terms the West's monopoly on High Theory. Such an intervention, for example, re-presents Enlightenment rationalism, the modernist view of the writtenness of language, as overconfident. Descartes comes to mind here, as well as a similar thesis in Richard Rorty to the effect that we can completely describe the world (215). In this same modernist-postmodernist genealogy, are such modes of theoretic thought as the irremediably disseminated, free-floating nature of the subject, and the absolutist prioritisation of writing. Such deductions are debatable, because based on a sophisticated but flawed understanding of reality and the properties of language. Traditional, ancient African philosophy not only maintains that ontology is prior to and exceeds representation, but that subjectivity, understood as full consciousness, is not exhausted by ultrarationalist discourse. Undaunted by the current marginalisation of the metaphysics of presence, of referentiality, and of essentialism, the DBSC blends history and memory to reconstitute a set of issues in the history of philosophic representation without which a reassertion of a Black presence would be unintelligible to many modern Westerners, and even to culturally alienated Blacks. End-of-millennium efforts around the end of the year 2000 to take stock of the state of Western

philosophy produced enough scepticism to make one attentive to the DBSC's stance on theory. For similar reasons, feminism believes it still has good reasons to keep High Theory at arm's length, given the latter's allergy to the grounding of theory in any kind of essentialism. As an epistemologic necessity then, the DBSC undertakes its rereading of human evolution and the history of ideas, by including as part of its critical or hermeneutic tools pre-modern modes of being and apprehension. The Conversation's search for a new, pluralist, and humanist meaning of History does not seek to escape the concrete, material burden of Black history. Rather, it seeks to affirm the possibility of a Black intellectual renaissance at a time when various forms of Western hypertheory seem to deny such a possibility. It seems understandable, then, that a good part of such a new Black intellectual affirmation be formulated in a discourse that is more than just solely materialist. Hence, the case for the intelligibility of myth, ritual, mysticism, etc. to complement the conceptual grid of materialist ontology. Here, then, hovers the future of Black critical theory and poetics: the possibility of outflanking the often inhibiting and flashy sterility of much of postmodernist and deconstructive thought, i. e., its impressive eloquence that, nonetheless, appears to lack an epistemological and ethical horizon.

A quick word here on existing Black Egyptology and its orientation, as a way of clarifying my twofold objective which is the consolidation and extension of the DBSC theses. Black Egyptology produced by the theorists and academics I will later introduce (Cheikh Anta Diop, Théophile Obenga, St. Clair Drake, Jacob Carruthers, and others) barely preoccupies itself with the literary application of its theses, given the particular disciplinary thrust of these scholars.⁴ More importantly, I note that when Egypt(ology) does emerge in Black literary discourse as in Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* (MLAW), in Toni Morrison's essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," (discussed below), in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, or in Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* and, less directly, in Aimé

Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, these major writers are not interested in (or capable of) offering a systematic, sustained, and coherent account of Egypt in Black art forms. Either they shy away from the chance to do so -- as does Morrison -- or they only offer a (very) distant echo of Egypt that they throw in here and there in what psychoanalysts might perhaps call fragments of discourse from the subconscious/unconscious. The result is that an organic account does not emerge. I try to overcome this lacuna as a background and prelude to my reading of fiction in Chapter 4 where I posit Egypt as a plausible unifying motif in Black fiction; and this chapter is itself a discussion leading into my speculation on the direction of Black literary theory in Chapter 5. All along, I also refer to recent Western Egyptology and to Western revisionist theory that, to my knowledge, previous studies do not mention. While scientific views of human evolution may change and compel us to modify our theories, in light of current knowledge, the DBSC makes a credible case for revisionism; for a reassessment of Africa's significance in the history of ideas. When this revisionist turn in theory is applied to literature, it means, among other things, the need to re-examine the appropriateness of the application of textualist theories to Black literature, given the particular genealogy of thought that produced such textualist modes of reading. By demonstrating the ultimately political intent of such readings through a re-presentation of the long history behind them, new Black literary theory will debunk their claim to a superiority of insight. The re-examination of ancient history as it enhances our understanding of the current state of critical theory is, therefore, what I attempt in chapters 4 and 5. As I hope the variety of African and non-African observers I draw on will show, a revisionist trend is gaining momentum in various disciplines that indicates a renewed interest in the Black Africa-ancient Egypt axis, and, therefore, a renewed interest in the true significance of Black Africa in the history of ideas.

In the closing chapters, then, the thesis attempts what, to my knowledge, has not been systematically done before: an examination of the literary consequences or applications of the DBSC. Existing scholarship has focussed on the historical, spiritual, and philosophic dimensions of the issues. My thesis, therefore, extends the debate by teasing out the literary implications of this DBSC alternative onto-epistemology. Much of Black literature has been reluctantly inscribed in the canon of world literature only as protest and 'race' literature. While the attribution of such a label may not be entirely inaccurate, the interpretation of how the labelling came about, the full story of the epistemological conditions that so framed Black literature, has seldom been fully told in Western literary history. As I hope to show through my mobilisation of human evolution theory, Black literature became protest literature for reasons that can be traced back to turns or directions in very ancient history that certainly go beyond colonialism, and even beyond the Enlightenment and the Renaissance, the latter two being where most revisionist studies of the significance of Black literature in world poetics often begin. So ancient and intractable are many of these issues that, because they have been banished from most official Western accounts of cultural evolution, the Black literature which draws attention to them is easily labelled wrongheaded and unsophisticated. This kind of admonishing is mainly what Soyinka refers to when, in *MLAW*, he explains his "concern to transmit through analysis of myth and ritual the self-apprehension of the African world" (IX). He writes:

It has been with an increasing sense of alarm and even betrayal that we have watched our position distorted and exploited to embrace a 'sophisticated' school of thought which (for ideological reasons) actually repudiates the existence of an African world! Both in cultural and political publications, and at such encounters as the UNESCO Conference on the Influence of Colonialism on African Culture, Dar es Salam 1972, the 6th Pan-African Congress, Dar es Salam 1974, the pre-Colloque of the Black Arts Festival, Dakar 1974 etc., etc., we black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation – this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value-systems. (IX-X)

In responding to what looks like a concerted assault on its humanity, Black critical theory, like most minority discourses, must necessarily posit some identitarian vantage point from which to articulate a countertheory. Yet, Black critical theory must walk the tightrope of formulating a corrective countertheory and the avoidance of the trap of making Black literature too predictable and, therefore, easier to stereotype. But again, the ability to theorise Black culture/literature equitably, to restore a natural sense of balance to it and reinstate it in world cultural history, requires a continuous sense of one's history. As a corrective to a truncated sense of history and of the self, the emerging mode of Black theory I am interested in is, therefore, a new, organic, historical, and philosophic formulation of African civilisation and historical agency, as they gradually emerged from the southern hemisphere to the northern. It is a trajectory and dynamics that shows how Africa was once at the forefront of civilisation; and it might enable a new understanding and reformulation of (the history of) the Black novel itself. Such a new understanding and the new Black fiction which thematises it would be an augmentation of the identity and mandate of the Black novel, a new interpretation of the object of its desire that goes beyond the simple thematics of postindependence strictly political contestations that is too fixated on the twentieth century. It would pose this desire as the understandable necessity to creatively refigure the ethnic self through a revamping of a tradition of theoretic thought which by itself (the restricted temporality within which it operates) is ill-equipped, since it is too often unconsciously dependent on Euro-American archetypes and paradigms. One way to fixate the conditions and nature of the new Black subjectivity, fiction, and literary theory I am arguing, is to point out here that they are underpinned by Stephen Jay Gould's "deep time," and Jacob Carruthers's "deep thought," two concepts that I will more explicitly refer to later. They are concept-paradigms which enable us to image and theorise (Black) Africa in considerably different terms.

When what was originally a Black culture followed human evolution and peaked in Egypt where geographic and climactic conditions were exceptional, it produced the spiritual, metaphysical, and scientific prototypes the rest of humankind would later try to emulate. By identifying this prototype as essentially belonging in the same cultural space as Black Africa, a new understanding of African and Black literature (and critical theory) can be enabled through an extension of their historicity and thematic range. The trajectory of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels certainly suggests the extent of the literary territory Black fiction can be made to cover. Such a potential is also latent in fiction produced by the Black diaspora. Works by Jean Toomer and Erna Brodber are amenable to such a reading of fiction as a retextualisation of the historical and metaphysical self. On alternative epistemologies and their impact on literature, Ralph Cohen writes:

Many literary theorists, when they discuss change, rely on scientific models of paradigm change or cultural models of epistemic change or political models of social change, rather than on models appropriate to what takes place in literary theory and practice. (VII)

One interpretation of Cohen's point is that there is and should be a fecund imbrication of literature and other disciplines. Therefore, his view confirms the wrongheadedness of the discourse of extremist textualism which not only insulates literature from other concerns and disciplines but, through its often unavowed policing of the borders of Western letters, excludes other subjectivities – racial, feminist, etc. Placing literature in previously unauthorised or simply untried historical perspectives, therefore, enables richer interpretations. Thus, I offer a quick reading of three highly coded novels in the Black tradition and canon: Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Erna Brodber's *Myal*, and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Osiris Rising*. I read them as they relate to historical/cultural amnesia and as narrative/aesthetic constitutions and refigurations of subjectivity. I see them as the site of racial memory, and of stereotypical ethnic consciousness in a process of metamorphosis. My Pan-African perspective does not artificially yoke the three novels

together⁵ Instead, using a principle of intersubjectivity, it identifies structures of race and desire which are then correlated into a kind of trans-Atlantic, 'call and response' ontological dynamic. I adapt the call and response notion to mean here a Pan-African dynamics of complementarity whereby a call went out before and after independence for a search for Africa, and how, as what I consider a response, a new type of literature may be pointing to where and what Africa is. Intersubjectively speaking, it means, in the novels, the diasporic desire for plenitude which leads to Africa, and the African search which is consummated in acknowledging and thanking the diasporic subject for being there. In other words, given the particular mythic structure within which the plot and Pan-African cast of characters are subsumed in *Osiris Rising*, I read the disjunctive texture of *Cane* and *Myal* as the (largely unconscious) disintegration of consciousness or the dismemberment of Osiris, as the transformative repetition of originary subjectivity as consciousness that is sundered but can be reintegrated. *Cane* and *Myal* are, in other words, thematisations of a desire for racial plenitude. Narrative in Toomer and Brodber is enabled as a rather inarticulate, unconscious, obscurity inhabiting and driving the Black novel, in this case, that of the Black diaspora. In Armah, narrative unfolds as the Black subjectivity's conscious new desire, its revelatory enactment of itself in the quest for originary meaning. The novel is a figuration of the sense that cross-Atlantic Black plenitude is at hand. In the relationship I establish with *Cane* and *Myal*, the liturgical lexicon and the African mythic structure (the Osiris myth) of *Osiris Rising* function as the conscious acknowledgement of that which is subconscious in Toomer's and Brodber's novels, and as the assertive concretisation or consummation (or the beginning of it) of the desired plenitude. *Osiris Rising* is rebirth and transcendence, or the conscious beginning of such a resurrection. As a conscious figuration of the process of gathering the limbs of Osiris, *Osiris Rising* is an aesthetic representation of the subject as rising consciousness, a symbolisation of the rising body as the realisation of the *telos*. As a

high, immanent, concept, this idea of the rising body serves as the unifying concept underpinning the various themes of *Osiris Rising* itself. It is in this sense a necessary prefiguration or locus of the rebirth of literary theory itself. Armah's ideological message is in his mystical revelation of the Black human agency's potential to determine the material conditions of its own ethnic existence.

The argument that Black philosophy and fiction cannot prioritise a necrophiliac postmodernism rests on the contention that contrary to modernism's dismissal of traditional paradigms, Black cultural theory, while remaining open to newness in human thought, insists that these paradigms, among the very first to have shaped consciousness, are still too much part of human consciousness and psyche to be so hastily discarded. Modernity edited the fullness of reality by reducing it to the subject-object polarity, a binarism that can produce only reductive truths. The self-Other variation of this compartmentalisation of reality in critical thought epistemologically made possible the later invention and essentialisation of race. For, from the mind/self and alterity thesis to the effect that what the subject knows is the only thing that counts, it was possible and convenient to construe the Black Other as particularly otherworldly and unredeemable, because it was outside the realm of the Western Self's or Same's empirical gaze. A race-conscious reading of Western historiography, therefore, exposes the discursive mechanisms through which discourse gradually became racialised as a result of becoming hegemonic in its rapport with its invented alterity. The different and very ancient subjectivity that now struggles to articulate and reassert itself is best apprehended in the revisionist diachronic intervention of the DBSC. Thus, addressing the pre-modern thematics as it relates to ancient Egypt and the Black Other, Drake, in Volume 1 of *Black Folk Here and There*, insists, "[t]he question of the race of the early Egyptians is bound up with the question of where predynastic movement toward civilization in the Nile Valley [and the rest of the world] began" (154).

On the critical exploration of the Black substratum of Egyptian civilisation (a Black problematics which, as I explain below, is not quite the same as the position Martin Bernal defends in *Black Athena*), only those Black theorists and academics whose interventions tackle or are potentially conducive to a new understanding of the history of literary archetypes and of the evolution of literary theory will be discussed. What I loosely refer to as the Dakar-Brazzaville-Stanford Conversation (DBSC) mainly refers to the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop, the other Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Congolese (from what was formerly known as Congo-Brazzaville) Théophile Obenga, the African-American St. Clair Drake, and the conversation one can try to establish between them on the Black Africa-ancient Egypt debate.

Educated in Senegalese and French universities, the late Diop held degrees and other qualifications in a variety of disciplines. He took a Doctorat es Lettres at the Sorbonne. In France, Diop studied under such scholars as Frédéric Joliot-Curie and Marie Curie, André Aymard, André Leroi-Gourhan, Gaston Bachelard et al. He was a brilliant iconoclast, for at the time he brought physics and linguistics to bear on the rereading of African and world history, Egyptology was a forbidden (because considered sensitive) area of research to Black African students in France. And so, Diop had to overcome a considerable amount of resistance to his project. Diop is the most consistent, the most scientifically rigorous, and the most prolific participant in the conversation. I have divided his main works into two categories, though not all of them will be discussed. The division is also intended to indicate the breadth of his œuvre:

A. The Humanities:

- I. *Nations nègres et Culture* (1954)
- II. *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire* (1959); translated as *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (1978)

- III. *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* (1960); translated as *Precolonial Black Africa* (1987)
- IV. *Antériorité des civilisations nègres. Mythe ou vérité historique?* (1967); selections from this book and from *Nations nègres et Culture* have been compiled and translated as *The African Origin of Civilisation: Myth or Reality* (1974)
- V. *Civilisation ou Barbarie—Anthropologie sans complaisance* (1981); translated as *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* (1991)

B. Science

- I. *Physique nucléaire et chronologie absolue* (1974)
- II. *Parenté génétique de l'égyptien pharaonique et des langues négro-africaines* (1977)
- III. *Philosophie, Science et Religion* (1985)

Diop's most significant contribution lies in his life-long research in physics at the *Institut Fondamental D'Afrique Noire* (IFAN) located at what was then *Université de Dakar*, now known as *Universté Cheikh Anta Diop*. Diop's obsession was to provide a scientific grounding and corroboration for his thesis of the Black origin of Egyptian civilisation.

The late Senghor was an Africanist, Hellenist, classicist, poet, Nobel-prize nominee, former president of his country and, until his death, a member of the *Académie Française*. Among his works, *Ce Que Je Crois: Négritude, Francité et Civilisation de l'Universel* is of particular interest. Unlike the other three participants, Senghor was a believer in Négritude. *Ce Que Je Crois* is an erudite account of human evolution in and out of Africa, and of the rise of spirituality, philosophy, and art. However, even here, Senghor does not appear to have completely shed what many of his critics (Fanon, Soyinka, Stanislas Adotevi, and others) see as a disturbing inferiority complex vi-à-vis Christianity and the West. The book also argues a passionate defence of poetry from the perspective of Négritude. Though the book re-states many of the arguments Diop already formulated, it is arguably Senghor's most enduring pronouncement on poetics

and literary theory. *Ce Que Je Crois*'s erudite defence of poetry owes its originality to the fact that here, like other truly original Black thinkers, Senghor situates his discourse squarely above the purview of the average reader of French. The complexity of the issues discussed and the breadth of evolutionary time covered make necessary the intellectual standard of Senghor's discourse. He goes beyond the mediocrity and half-truths written about Africa and poetry. He aspires to and, by and large, accomplishes one particular Black Egyptologist objective: locate in incantations and spells, the stuff that much of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* is about, a possible origin of poetic enunciation. His reading, on page 120, of a section/'stanza' of this foundational text which explicitly deals with the power of incantatory utterance, his comments elsewhere on the divine and creative Word, the fact that he reminds the reader of the etymological meaning of *poiêsis* as creation, and the way he keeps reminding his reader that poetry is what he believes in, "ce que je crois," very much suggest that this is Senghor's ultimate objective in this book. Clearly, this sense of the nature and history of poetry, also essentially proffered by Soyinka, is worlds apart from the simplistic and literalist pronouncements of a Chinweizu, in *Towards the Decolonisation of African Literature*, on what "responsible" African poetry should be about. In *Ce Que Je Crois*, Senghor seizes this opportunity to clarify what he considers as misunderstandings regarding some of his positions on the essence of Blackness. He returns to these "misunderstandings" in *Pour Une Relecture Africaine de Marx* where he denies having foregrounded intuition (instead of reason) in his characterisation of the essence of Blackness. To him, it is rather a question of balancing both concepts in a creative and intellectually rewarding complementarity.

Théophile Obenga studied in Africa, Europe, and the United States, and has written extensively on Egypt and commented on Diop's works. His qualifications include a Doctorat d'Etat. Among his specific contributions are articles and books on linguistics,

philosophy, and mathematics in ancient Egypt and Black Africa. Obenga also teaches ancient Egyptian (the language). Two of his numerous books interest us: *La Philosophie Africaine* (1990) and *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa* (1992).

The late St. Clair Drake received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Chicago. His two-volume *Black Folks Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology* (1987 and 1990) is a major Black diaspora contribution to the debate. African antiquity was more than just intellectual curiosity to Drake, for it went hand in hand with social activism in the United States and Africa where, like DuBois, he lived and taught for quite some time. Here now are some of the DBSC's main theses:

- A. The first humans emerged in Africa and were almost certainly Black. From Eastern and Southern Africa, they spread all over the continent and to other parts of the world.
- B. Before the dynastic pharaohs, Egypt was a Negroid/Black -- i. e., sub-Saharan -- culture. These Blacks were the originators of the spiritual, ethical, philosophic, and scientific ideas which constituted the foundation of the culture that would peak during the time of the dynasties, by which time non-Blacks had been integrated into Egyptian society. Many Pharaohs were Black.
- C. Blood-type and language are reliable criteria when establishing cultural links. (As I will show later, in the geographic areas immediately close to Black Africa -- Northern Africa, the Middle East, Southern Europe -- even today blood tests confirm a Black substratum (an underlying gene). This observation is similar to the one scientists have made about Africa and the history of human genes. Linguistics has established a link between ancient Egyptian and Black African languages. Spiritually (paganism, animism, mysticism), philosophically (cosmology), and linguistically, ancient Egypt is more linked to traditional Black Africa than to any other culture.

- D. Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Thales of Miletus, and other Greek thinkers studied under Egyptian priests in Egypt. These priests initiated their Greek students into the enigma and mystery of life and death, the dynamics of the cosmic universe, alchemy, geometry, etc. The Greeks often misapplied these concepts, for they did not profoundly understand what the priests had taught them. (This less-than-perfect assimilation was the source of the tensions and inconsistencies in Western philosophy that Ricoeur, Derrida, and others, before and after them, would seek to rectify.)
- E. There is a lot about Greek thought, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that is, in reality, of Egyptian provenance. Virtually all of their mythological, philosophic, and spiritual archetypes were borrowed from the ancient Egyptians.⁶
- F. Africa was at the forefront of civilisation before this devolved to the West through Greece and Christianity. Not only has the West denied the Egyptian connection, it has also made it epistemologically possible to invent and trivialise Africa (including Egypt, as we will see in Hegel below) and Blackness. As a result of this partial rendition of historical and onto-epistemological truth, Western philosophy seems to have run its course and hit an impasse. A truly sincere revamping will have to retell the story of philosophy, and reaffirm its wholistic ethics. This process of reconciling humankind with itself is incomplete without the reinstatement of Africa; i. e., including Black Africa.

The DBSC is not the simplistic pronouncements of a group of misguided pseudoscholars. It is not an isolationist nativism. It does not even claim a superiority for Black culture. It only makes the simple proposition that humankind (through Europe and the West) fatally betrayed itself by truncating the full account of history and misunderstanding the full nature of reality. In effect, the West has conspired to write Africa (Blacks, most specifically) out of history. The epistemological and ethical

reverberations of such a breach of the 'covenant' for a common humanity are being felt even at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the form of a belated willingness to take a second look at alternative and often discredited versions of truth. The "unequivocal blessings" of the ideality of modernity and its legacy are now being viewed with more scepticism than before.

What I variously refer to as "subject", "subjectivity", "subjective agency", and "narrative subjectivity" is Africa and/or the Black person as historical agency, or as narrative subjectivity in literature. The modern Black person is the product of a particular historical process which began when the Judeo-Christian West highjacked and constructed History; and "agency" stands both for Black people and for that within them which impels them to freely determine the material conditions of their existence in their effort to grapple with conditions of forced exile and coloniality. I, therefore, propose the tentative terms and expressions "subject", "subjectivity" and "subjective agency". "Narrative subjectivity" is proposed as the literary version of this Black selfhood, will, or identity. What the historical and literary subjectivities and discourses have in common is their ability to disrupt and undo the stereotypical regime of Blackness constructed by the reductive menu of Western anthropological discourse. "Narrative subjectivity" could be said to enact a more subversive dynamics of this disruption. This is because it manifests itself as desire signified in language, it enacts an effect of free agency which problematises modernist discourse and even postmodernist fictional truth. This is so, because its effect enables one to sense the indirect but calculated ways modernism and postmodernism have of reinscribing a Judeo-Christian and Western idea of truth while appearing to be undermining it in the name of reason and a humanist universality. No minority identity has paid a heavier price for modernity than the Black.⁷ Still, none of this is a wholesale rejection of Cartesian and postmodernist thoughts; though there are indeed serious grounds for suspicion.⁸ If philosophy is reinterpreted within a longer

stretch of historical time, a more genuine and sincere sense of humanism would emerge. Yet, a significant number of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Black and other minority counterdiscursive practices that have sought to articulate a more humanist idea of philosophy have been described as a regrettable relapse into spiritualist mystification.

⁹ Black historical revisionism shows that the genealogy of critical theory remains skewed and myopic, and that representing Africa in a new perspective on evolution and on the history of ideas can help understand and resolve this crisis. It can be done, by refamiliarising ourselves with the early moments of theory and the significance of its African origins. In his recent book, *The African Experience: From Olduvai Gorge to the 21st Century*, Roland Oliver reads the future of theory back into ancient Africa by offering such a new perspective on the African factor in History:

As Africa reaches the threshold of the third millenium, it seems right to ...discern which strands in the African experience show most signs of continuing relevance to the present. In this context, the long and distant period of man's evolution as a scavenger, hunter and gatherer may seem at first sight to be of marginal significance. Yet the primacy of Africa in human evolution is a recent discovery, which has so far had time to achieve only a fraction of its potential impact. Already scientists are learning to see Africa not as a quaint backwater but as the scene of man's acquisition of his deepest genetic characteristics. It seems likely that, as this knowledge spreads and is pondered by the next generation of scientists across the whole spectrum of intellectual disciplines, the outside world will learn to think of Africa with more respect and that Africans themselves will face their fellow humans with a new confidence. If the recent findings of molecular biology find acceptance, to the effect that the planet was not merely first colonized from Africa, but also largely recolonized by the first fully sapient humans spreading out again from Africa within the last 100,000 to 200,000 years, the general impact should be even stronger.

Shorter-term by these standards, but still extending backwards at least ten thousand years to the early stages...and still today full of significance, is ...Africa's linguistic and cultural ethnicity. (301)

Africa is a major factor in History for the much more pertinent reason that, again, it formulated before any other culture many of the main archetypes which underpin civilisation. As we will see with C.A. Diop, Michael Rice, and others, European and Western civilisation owes its archetypes to Africa. To revisit such foundational concepts and early moments in intellectual and spiritual speculation is, therefore, not necessarily a

turning back of the clock of civilisation. Barry Kemp certainly suggests this necessity when he cautions:

We underestimate the intellectual grasp of reality in the ancient world if we take myth and symbol only at their face values, as curious images and odd fragments of tales that do not quite make sense. In rejecting the written and symbolic language of ancient myth as having no rational validity, we should not be too quick at the same time to throw out the ideas or sensations which [lie] behind. They, too, may well be part of basic thought, and universal.

The survival in the modern mind of the same avenues of thought that were open to the ancients supplies part of the mental apparatus by which we can make sense of the past. We can rethink ancient [Egyptian] logic. (4, emphasis added)

Thus, it is not enough to want to mine early human speculative endeavour for insight into the present; a different temporal perspective must also be brought to bear on ancient African phenomenology and on History as a whole. Such a perspective reveals a genealogy not familiar to many in the West. In the current fierce debate over the genealogy of civilisation, Paul Ricoeur has not only shown that reality and even history can be articulated and read in different registers, he is also determined to fixate the Westerner on that which his or her culture has deliberately suppressed, because Western civilisation has a thesis to "prove", namely that Africa is inconsequential in world history. Thus, according to Ricoeur,

Philosophy...has to do with the coming to being of an institution, a skill, and a power, lost in the dark past of culture and connected with Egypt, the cradle of religious wisdom. (Valdes, 332)

Such a shift in our understanding of the history of ideas has been perceived in some circles as a threat to the Westerner's sense of identity. This lack of self-confidence is one of the main themes of Tom Hare's *Re-Membering Osiris: Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems*. In the following remark, Hare assesses the impact of the Black Athena controversy; an issue I will discuss in some detail later:

What is difficult to imagine here is how a controversy like this could have garnered so much public attention and how it could have reached the level of intensity and acrimony it has exhibited, when the dispute is seemingly over such

small potatoes as the etymology of *hiketis* or the question of whether Euripides had visited Egypt. There is, of course, much more at stake, but in a curious way, neither Bernal nor Lefkowitz seems willing to acknowledge the fact outright.

Greek philosophy is more than Plato and Aristotle, and Greek science made few of its celebrated "discoveries" in Athens (217).

Mine is not a primarily Bernalian approach to ancient Egypt. Rather, it is Pan-Africanist. Well before and after Martin Bernal, Black academics, artists, and theorists raised the issue of a Black factor in Greek civilisation. Predictably, they have been discredited, and so do not get any of the coverage now showered on Bernal -- neither do Yosef ben-Jochannan and J. A. Rogers. The issue, again, is that Black African spirituality, mysticism, and mystical scientific knowledge and art-forms founded Egyptian civilisation, and that the Greeks owe the foundations of their own civilisation to Egypt where many of their greatest minds studied under Egyptian priests.¹⁰ Senghor is unequivocal on this latter point: In *Ce Que Je Crois*, he writes:

C'est donc aux VIIe, VIe, et Ve siècles avant notre ère que les principaux savants, philosophes et écrivains grecs sont allés prendre, des mains Égyptiens, le flambeau de la civilisation. Et l'Europe, malgré les apports majeur de l'Asie -- je songe aux trois religions révélées -- l'a gardé jusqu'ici, ce flambeau. Je citerai parmi ces pèlerins de la civilisation humaine: Thalès de Milet, qui rapporta, d'Égypte, les fondements de la géométrie, Pythagore, le philosophe et mathématicien, Eudoxe de Cnide, le philosophe et astronome. Je m'arrêterai à Platon, disciple de Socrate, et à Hérodote, Le Père de l'Histoire. Ces deux génies ont joué un rôle primordial. C'est Platon qui a fait de la philosophie une science et un art en même temps. (205, emphasis added)

As I will later show, in addition to what African and Black commentators have said, such modern Westerners as Michael Rice and Michael Hoffman have, respectively, confirmed the Blackness of the original inhabitants of the Nile Valley and have pointed out the Black African origin of many Egyptian institutions and socio-religious practices. Rice's contribution to Egyptology is an approach which draws on psychology to re-theorise ancient Egypt for the late twentieth-century in terms of the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious is Egypt and how, as the source of many archetypes still regulating intellectual and spiritual discourses in the West, it keeps returning, in spite

of efforts by some to prevent its resurgence. Like Rice, Hoffman argues the Blackness of the original Egyptians. However, Hoffman is more specific in the way he establishes the connection with Black Africa. He mentions specific ritual practices and points to their probable origin in Black Africa. His book is thus a single but valuable piece of Egyptology. Four years before Rice's *Egypt's Legacy*, another Westerner, Grégoire Kolpaktchy, had published his *Livre des Morts des Anciens Egyptiens*. Like the other carefully chosen Western contributions that interest me, Kolpaktchy's book is amenable to theoretic literary reflection. The thrust of his book is religious, as it examines theogony and traces the spread of organised religion from Egypt to the rest of the world. Though Kolpaktchy does not refer to Black Africa, the sheer depth of his exposition on religion and the nature and dynamics of the human soul is rather unique for the light it sheds on the genealogy of Western philosophy.

Where religion is concerned, polytheism, Akhenathon's monotheism, the original Jews, the original Christians, all emerged from Egypt. Hegel's philosophy of history is, therefore, a travesty of history in its account of Africa's significance. Martin Bernal's strain of the current historical revisionism is, briefly stated, his argument that it was because the Jews were related to the "dark" Phoenicians and North Africans that, out of its determination to invent a Caucasian and Eurocentric version of history, Caucasian and anti-Semitic Europe suppressed Jewish and Black contributions to civilisation and extolled a Greek origin of it. Clearly, Bernal's is also an image of the West's genealogy it does not want to be reminded of. Unlike Bernal and Lefkowitz (as viewed by Hare), Gary Greenberg does not leave his present-day Western reader guessing what the acrimonious row is really about; unpacking the West from the slightly different perspective of first interrogating the "uniqueness" of Judaism and Israel, he unequivocally enunciates it in the very first paragraph of his book:

Who were the earliest Israelites? Where did they come from, and under what circumstances did they rise to power in Canaan? These questions, which bear on the intellectual origins of Western civilization, engage the finest minds in biblical studies.(1, emphasis added)

Greenberg goes on to ask a series of probing questions which help structure his arguments:

How do we know, independent of the Bible, that Israel's presence in Egypt was preceded by an earlier presence in Palestine? Why is there no archeological record of Israel or the Hebrew people prior to the thirteenth century B.C.? Why is there no extrabiblical evidence linking any Semitic tribes to the Hebrew people? And why did the so-called ten lost tribes disappear from history without an archeological trace of their existence? (2)

To some, Christianity itself is not as unique as generally thought for, according to Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy in *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the Original Jesus A Pagan God?:*

We have become convinced that the story of Jesus is not the biography of an historical Messiah, but myth based on perennial Pagan stories. Christianity was not a new and unique revelation but actually a Jewish adaptation of the ancient Pagan Mystery religion....

As long ago as the Renaissance, mystics and scholars saw the origins of Christianity in the ancient Egyptian religion....

For 2,000 years the West has been dominated by the idea that Christianity is sacred and unique, whilst Paganism is primitive and the work of the Devil. To even consider that they could be part of the same tradition has been simply unthinkable. Therefore, although the true origins of Christianity have been obvious all along, few have been able to see them, because to do so requires a radical break with the conditioning of our culture. (2-3 passim)

Though many of the above arguments are not new, to my knowledge they have seldom been advanced to show how (Black) Africa really counts in the emergence and evolution of spirituality. The conditioning of the Western mind, but as it applies to the history of the Novel, is what interests Margaret Anne Doody in *The True Story Of The Novel* (1997):

What critics say about the Novel is related to what those critics think about history, psychology, sociology, and their analyses in turn will affect history-writing and the making of history, as well as theories of sociology, psychology, and so on. At present, the entire Western tradition is being overhauled and put to question – mainly, no doubt, because of Western contact with other nations and peoples, some of whom are not going to be subjugated to the West but already have some power over us....

Political events (in the broadest sense of "political") indicate that nation is going to speak unto nation more often than hitherto, and in a different way. If writers and critics who, like myself, are undeniably Western want to explain to ourselves and others who we are and what we in the West have been doing and thinking during our history – say in the past couple of millenia or so – we need to be ready to correct and amplify the story that we tell ourselves. Otherwise we will mislead ourselves and others. (4-5, passim, emphases added)

I will later draw attention to how Doody's re-reading of the birth and evolution of the Novel enables her to help us see present-day literary theory in clearer perspective. Doody's reading of the evolution of the Novel mentions Egypt's significance in it.¹¹

Given that Africa's true history (what would have been its normal trajectory) was disrupted by slavery and colonisation which ushered the continent into the sphere of influence and history of the West on terms other than its own, Black poetics and critical theory can be usefully seen as loose discourses in search of an anchor. They are discursive practices authored by a narrative subjectivity still shakily negotiating the topography of literature and theory. Western epistemology's refusal to countenance an African history and order of knowledge has a long history, as we have seen. A look at the West's main anthologies on world religions, philosophy, history, and literature shows either a Black absence, or a grudgingly brief inclusion which makes such a presence inconsequential. An increasing number of schools of thought argues that far from reflecting scholarly objectivity, such canonic constructions constitute deliberate hegemonic reductionism. In his preface to Volume I of the UNESCO-sponsored *General History of Africa*, commenting on Eurocentric methodology, the Senegalese Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mathar Mbow, writes:

There[is] a refusal to see Africans as the creators of original cultures which flowered and survived over the centuries in patterns of their own making and which historians are unable to grasp unless they forgo their prejudices and rethink their approach. (XVII)

On the politics of historiographic discourse, the editor of this first volume, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, observes that "discoveries about Africa, sometimes spectacular ones, call in question the meaning of certain phases in the history of mankind as a whole" (2). The

relevance of this debate to literary studies is suggested in Volume II of this UNESCO project. Here, Cheik Anta Diop asserts that " Egyptian antiquity is to African culture what Greco-Roman antiquity is to Western culture. The building of a corpus of African humanities should be based on this fact" (49). Ancient Egypt was the zenith of an evolutionary process which began in what is, when all is said and done, Black Africa, where the first humans are believed to have emerged before climatic conditions and other factors caused them to migrate to the Nile valley.

Human Evolution and the Rise of Philosophy

Roland Oliver's comments provide a useful point of entry into the specific debate on the plausible African origin of philosophy. To a considerable extent, Africa remains a missing link in Western art and literary history, an occluded factor in the history of ideas. Its (re) emergence as the source of many ideas inherited by the West, via ancient Greece, makes very real the idea of the continent as breast of the earth (Kofi Awoonor). The post-slavery and postcolonial Black theorist's search for an authentic order of knowledge comes, therefore, from a reading of Western epistemology--from late antiquity to the Enlightenment--as essentially a disciplinary failure. Africa's re-emergence in historiography as articulated by the DBSC is, then, the Black theorist's recommitment to articulations of explanation and causation which track with unprecedented rigour various silences and failures through an interrogation of Western historiographic thought, in order to expose its reductive metanarratives. The resulting necessary reintroduction of the elided African and Black subject also has the effect of bearing out Pan-Africanism's and DuBois's proposition in *The Souls of black Folk* decades ago that race is very much the key factor in the politics of linguistic representation and critical discourse. To DuBois, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (*Souls*, 23).

The DBSC's historical argument, as we have stated, is that Black Africa counts in evolution theory. Its theological argument is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are not apprehended in proper perspective unless read chronologically *vis-à-vis* Egypt. Its philosophical argument is that ancient African philosophy was eudaemonistic in outlook, and wholistic in articulation. Hence, Black phenomenology's reservations about the prioritisation of the written utterance in Western philosophy, and its reification into a set of absolutisms. The unwitting or calculated reinscription of this logocentrism in what was supposed to be an undermining of it in Derrida's philosophy of language comes as no surprise.¹²

To see why it is helpful to revisit the inception of philosophy for perspective on twenty-first century theory, it is important to recall how Descartes and Hegel have haunted Black critical theory from the beginning. Négritude-- a controversial response to Descartes--, and Soyinka's rectification of Négritude's onto-epistemological infelicities in *MLAW*, involved engaging Descartes. My chapter on the philosophical basis of the DBSC elaborates on the implications of the Cartesian effect. On the subject of Africa in Western philosophy, Hegel's philosophy of religion and of history has nothing but a barrage of racist anti-African invectives. In short, Descartes and Hegel have cast a shadow on Black discourse by severely limiting the Black subjective agency's chances and the space within which to articulate itself. To Descartes, history was/is Reason unfolding and this trend would forever be immutable due to its solid rational foundation. From Cartesian thought, the West inherited a set of paradigmatic concepts and categories which have over time closed its mind. In his comment on the prisonhouse of the Cartesian legacy, John R. Searle writes:

The vocabulary is not innocent, because implicit in the vocabulary are a surprising number of theoretical claims that are almost certainly false. The vocabulary includes a series of apparent oppositions; "physical" versus "mental," "body" versus "mind," "materialism" versus "mentalism," "matter" versus "spirit." Implicit in these oppositions is the thesis that the same phenomenon under the

same aspects cannot literally satisfy both terms. Sometimes the semantics and even the morphology seems to make this opposition explicit, as in the apparent opposition between "materialism" and "immaterialism." Thus we are supposed to believe that if something is mental, it cannot be physical; that if it is a matter of spirit, it cannot be a matter of matter...But these views seem to me obviously false, given everything we know about neurobiology. (14)

Until recently, the tenacity of the Cartesian hold on the Western mind was difficult to loosen, mainly because long-held positions in academia were troubled by the encroachment of structures of reality that undermined the seductiveness and absolutism of Cartesian "rigour". Such an attitude baffles Searles:

If one had to define the deepest motivation for materialism, one might say that it is simply a terror of consciousness. But should this be so? Why should materialists have a fear of consciousness? Why don't materialists cheerfully embrace consciousness as just another material property among others? Some, in fact...claim to do so. But they do this by so redefining "consciousness" as to deny the central feature of consciousness, namely, its subjective quality. The deepest reason for the fear of consciousness is that consciousness has the essentially terrifying feature of subjectivity. Materialists are reluctant to accept that feature because they believe that to accept the existence of consciousness would be inconsistent with their conception of what the world must be like (emphases added).¹³

The Cartesian quest for foundations and absolute certainty made it increasingly appealing for materialists to see a gap between subject and object, between consciousness and material reality, between past and present; but it led to the failure to see the relatedness of different sets of ideas. This seventeenth-century subjectivist turn in philosophy worked when applied to science as it was practised in those days when science sought to establish its identity *vis-à-vis* religion. Hegel and Hume later came to see the supposed rigour of scientific procedure as the most important criterion according to which to rate the races. In its reaction to this simplification of human nature and reality, Négritude implied that consciousness, which it rather unfortunately often referred to as "intuition," was what the Black person (as compared to the rational Westerner) had; consciousness being, as Searle and others have argued, what Descartes, Galileo, and others had excluded from the realm of scientific enquiry. In its hasty response to Cartesian posturing, Négritude stated that "intuition" was as important as reason which

was said to characterise the white person. But at times, Négritude seemed to say that "intuition" was more important. Négritude was trying, but awkwardly, to point out something that late twentieth-century scientific research and art-theory (Searle, Damato, Nussbaum, etc.) would confirm. In the process, Négritude fell into the trap of at least implying that all the Black person had was intuition, emotion, etc. Advances in neurobiology and in the study of consciousness have since discredited the simplicity of Cartesian dualisms, though conservative scholarship still resists the idea that consciousness be raised to a new epistemological status. As many have noted, when a number of events, including two world wars, shattered the illusion of the rule of Cartesian reason by showing the scale of brutality the European was capable of inflicting on his fellow whites (and non-whites), not only were European philosophers and artists shaken to their core, ironically, they turned to "primitive" philosophies and art-forms for possible redemptive alternative insights into life and human nature. As we will see, Soyinka's *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* is an informative source on this European crisis. Yet, Europe did not, as a result, proceed to acknowledge the racial Other as an equal. Even today, as a result of the variety of negative connotations attached to the concept of consciousness, academic conservatism has beefed up its policing of the borders of "reason." This observation brings us back to the effects in European modernity of the authority of Cartesian and Hegelian philosophies as metadiscipline (s) applied to Black subjectivity. In *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Cornell West writes:

The authority of science, undergirded by a modern philosophical discourse guided by Greek ocular metaphors and Cartesian notions, promotes and encourages the activities of observing, comparing, measuring, and ordering the physical characteristics of human bodies. Given the renewed appreciation and appropriation of classical antiquity, these activities are regulated by classical aesthetic and cultural norms. The creative fusion of scientific investigation, Cartesian epistemology, and classical ideals produced forms of rationality, scientificity, and objectivity which, though efficacious in the quest for truth and knowledge, prohibited the intelligibility and legitimacy of the idea of black equality

in beauty, culture, and intellectual capacity. In fact, to "think" such an idea was to be deemed irrational, barbaric, or mad (48).

This, in turn, brings us to what, for us, Descartes and Hegel have in common. To fully appreciate Hegel's influence on the idea of Africa in Western discourse, it is important to note that along with the reason-intuition debate which carried on into the 19th century, was a systematic fabrication of Europe's profile. Hegel's own binarism -- the dialectic of contending truths -- begot the transindividual subject which, because touched by a sublime spirit, would bring about the accrual of only human progress -- but not possibly a regression. Interpreters of Hegel's pronouncements came to see them as a call to enslave and colonise Africans and others. Though Hegel's idea of the moral superiority of the Judeo-Christian West has been disproved by history, he continues to stand on the shoulders of a Black critical theory which does not appear to be aware of what he owes Africa. This lack of appropriate perspective accounts for the fact that even very recent well-meaning strictures on Western epistemology remain essentially a valorisation of this frame of discourse. They cannot explicitly identify what Hegel owes Africa, though they readily cast aspersions on his status as a world thinker. For instance, due to the spiritual streak in his prolific socio-philosophical output, Cornell West at times cannot resist harnessing Hegelian notions and ally them to his cause. Fortunately, the realities of Black life in the United States and elsewhere always keep him in check. Hence, the following reservations:

For those of us who take seriously the centrality of race, gender and class—not simply as phenomena to morally condemn but also as structures of domination to theoretically comprehend—it is one thing to side with...Hegel about the crucial role of reciprocal recognition in subject-formations and another thing to leave open-ended connections between the truncated public sphere in liberal societies to pervasive structures of racism, sexism and class that circumscribe the cultures of these societies. In this regard, my disagreement ...encourage[s]...[a]..downplay[ing] of metaphysical conceptions of persons and [a] deepen[ing]...[of] structural analytical connections between the limited public space in liberal societies and the defects of the structures of racism, patriarchy and class.(232)

Black critical theory's task is to now take various regimes of philosophic theory, and rob them of their 'universality' by attacking Europe's account of the history of ideas. This interrogation will involve pointing out that such a core concept as consciousness or spirituality, which was fundamental to Hegel and Descartes, was not even Judeo-Christian and European by provenance, to start with. Many of the experts on the ancient world I refer to below elucidate this issue. Derrida's initial attempt to question the prioritisation of the writtenness of language and what he ended up producing belongs to a long set of Western inconsistencies. This inconsistency is the almost unconscious aporia in critical thought which the University of Cambridge's Catherine Pickstock seeks to redress in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Though Pickstock undertakes a very Christian interrogation of the West's extreme secularisation of philosophy and the divine Word (which my approach will often refer to simply as the mystical Word), her book concurs on many points with the essence of the series of lectures Soyinka gave at that institution more than twenty years earlier, and collected into *MLAW*. (But I will discuss the serious flaws in Pickstock's unconditional Christian perspective on religion and philosophy in the Conclusion to my thesis.) For now, her views on the inconsistencies and crises of Western philosophy are worth noting:

...on the one hand, postmodernism appears to have foreclosed the possibility of a benign, universal, rationalist humanism, while, on the other hand, it does not seem able to refute the suggestion that it is itself irredeemably nihilistic. Radical orthodoxy, however, has offered a third alternative: while conceding, with postmodernism, the indeterminacy of all our knowledge and experience of selfhood, it construes this shifting flux as a sign of our dependency on a transcendent source which "gives" all reality as a mystery, rather than as adducing our suspension over the void.

This new, more widely disseminated theology insists that the secular postmodern is only the logical outcome of the rationalism of modernity, and in no sense its inversion. And whereas the postmodern indulges in "playful" recuperation of the premodern cultural inheritance, radical orthodoxy recovers certain premodern themes as once again viable, by showing how they were not so trammelled by a dogmatic "metaphysics" as both modernists and postmodernists have tended to assume. (XII-XIII)

Pickstock is adamant:

[the Cartesian] self-identity of the object suggests that the superlative object is death itself, as conceived in modern Western, and postmodern thought. For this reason, there is a Cartesian element in postmodern "nihilism" of a Derridian kind. (71, footnote)

According to her, the solution involves a radical shift that liberates the quarantined dimensions of reality:

A successful liturgical revision would have to involve a revolutionary re-invention of language and practice which would challenge the structures of our modern world, and only thereby restore real language and action as liturgy. (171)

To this effect, we note that there is a long African philosophical tradition on the two main notions of language (mystical writing and orality) from which Pickstock is formulating her counterdiscourse. Traditional (not modern) Africa and ancient Egypt prioritise orality (understood here as consciousness, memory, speech, but not as the exotic "intuition" now associated with Négritude) as a more authentic medium. Secondly, though liberal Western theory acknowledges Egypt as the inventor of writing, the idea of the *grammata* Thoth invented has been misunderstood by modernity, postmodernity, and Derridian deconstruction. Authentic African philosophy, "deep thought," therefore seriously contests even Derrida's *pharmakon* (remedy) to the logocentric idea of language, because Derrida unwittingly or deliberately elides from it a redemptive property I will discuss shortly. This, then, is the ground on which Pickstock faults Descartes and Derrida. But, my real point is that Pickstock is mistaken in thinking that the concept of the divine Word is itself an originally Christian idea. At some point she is forced to acknowledge the Egyptian origin of her major concept: Thoth's invention, without which her theory of liturgy would be incomplete. For example, her index lists Thoth/Theuth as "inventor of liturgy" (290), a concept which is central to her theory of language as liturgy. However, the haste with which she transitions back to an absolutist Christian reading shows either that this is a deliberate move to avoid giving a complete and satisfactory explanation; or that she is unaware of the inconsistency created by the

introduction of Thoth. In short, Pickstocke does not satisfactorily the sudden appearance of African 'paganism' in her work.

It is necessary to briefly discuss Derrida and deconstruction here only as a way of registering their effect, some of it possibly unintended, on Black theories of Black subjectivity. I am not interested in a detailed discussion of Derrida, but only in his effect on current Black critical theory. I am interested in showing what most discussions of Derrida, including Mark C. Taylor's purportedly diachronic intervention, omit, because they are unable to read the history of philosophy beyond Greece: the African origin of the problematics of postmodernism/deconstruction. The privileged position, albeit a waning one, Derrida has in High Theory and its ultimate effects on minority identitarian discourses, illustrate the very real consequences of theory. The deconstructive turn in philosophy was to be an interrogation of the logocentric obsession of Western critical thought. To many, Derrida ended up reinscribing many of the values he was thought to want to debunk. In the context of the African 'authenticity' I am trying to argue here, the Derrida problematics could be approached in the following way: Derrida, an African-born non-African, has tried to imitate and deploy the mystical logic of the ancient African Word to scrutinise Western logocentrism. He could not quite pull it off, because there was too much of the condescending, ill-informed, or very consciously biased Judeo-Christian and Westerner in him. Differently put, for a number of reasons, Derrida could at best only imitate the essence of ancient African gnosis, which is what he is drawing on without quite clearly acknowledging this African character. Such original thinkers as Soyinka (and Wilson Harris, in a Caribbean context) can more directly access this originary conception of language and reality; and what Soyinka and Harris find in it does not impoverish the referential capacity of their fictional and critical discourses on the twenty-first century; it enriches it. In the oeuvres of Soyinka, Harris, and others, we have theories in actual praxis. Again, Soyinka's and Pickstock's theories of language have a

lot in common. Thanks to the DBSC and recent thematisations of Egypt in Black fiction, Black literary theory should now be able to save the Black text from deconstructionist overdetermination. By the same token, deconstruction can be shown to be ultimately a problematics of Egyptology, as I will try to demonstrate in the Conclusion of my thesis. For a start, here is Doody's comment on the nature and impact of Derridian philosophy of language on feminism. Clearly, her feminist position concurs with the Black one, though she is unable to carry the debate to a mystical, esoteric level. Still, her ideological punch is sincere and effective, for it unmaskes Derrida's bourgeois liberal *double jeux*. After recapitulating Derrida's *démarche* to date and pointing out its seductiveness, Doody registers her hard-hitting reservations:

But I cannot be a true deconstructionist. If Derrida offers some help in getting rid of oppressive authority, he is oppressive in his turn – an owl of Minerva, a prophet of night. In him is reflected the West's tendency to see any swerve from traditional authorities as the End of Civilization, the descent into the Abyss. Derrida, however, likes the view from the Abyss and prefers dark holes to entities. (1997, p.307)

From the more specific standpoint of her gendered subjectivity, she observes:

Some feminist critics have met the deafness with (metaphorical) voicelessness; following Derrida they have made not language but ululating noise, wordless moans, the voice of Woman. To fall into the trap of denigrating the Word (a trap baited by Derrida) is to give up the game, and to represent language as only and solely "male" is a pernicious and damaging fiction. Some structuralists became very conventional, reinforcing our notions of the civic in gloomy fashion, while the more serious deconstructionists left us little more than the Void to deal with, along with a general alibi for all moral action. They came on like Ezekiel, they exit looking like Harold Skimpole. (307, emphasis added)

Minority discourses see the overall *démarche* of deconstruction not only as a reinscription of white male power; they also point out that it has to operate like this because, as another form of (bourgeois) liberalism, it can only mask its own hypocrisy or genuine powerlessness in the face of the white male exploitation of all Others. What minorities perceive as deconstruction's antihumanism is its undermining of all identitarian enunciations. Pickstock is right in pointing out that deconstruction is essentially within the postmodern template of philosophising; and that, in fact, it has not

shed remnants of its distant modernist ancestry. From a specifically Black perspective, other minorities have been troubled by the ultimate failure of Derridian philosophy to avoid repeating rhetorical concealments of intents of power. Such is the essence of Cornell West's observation in *Keeping Faith*:

The major shortcomings of Derrida's deconstructive project is that it puts a premium on a sophisticated ironic consciousness that tends to preclude and foreclose analyses that guide action with purpose. His works and those of his followers too often become rather monotonous, Johnny-one-note rhetorical readings that disassemble texts with little attention to the effects and consequences these dismantlings have in relation to the operations of military, economic and social powers. (22, emphasis added)

African metaphysics grounds secular action in purpose which is itself subsumed within an infinity of possibilities. This infinity offers the subject or consciousness a mechanism for outliving or outwitting the limitations of Cartesian metaphysics and the disassembling and ultimately obliterating effect of postmodernist representation of Black agency. If this dynamics of being or consciousness is imaged in liturgical or mystical terms as is the case in the novels and literary theories I will be discussing, it is because this is a useful way of representing a fullness of reality in which Cartesian philosophy and its legacy are but elemental parts. The subject's continuous coming-into-being (understood as possibilities which exceed the empirical representation of the Cartesian sign and outwit the abstraction of deconstructionist dispersal), its will and determination, prevent it from being cast adrift. The representation of consciousness and identity in this register remains a viable alternative onto-epistemology against extremist High Theory and the price others pay for its dominance. Even when translated into existential terms, the depth of such a world-view is often best conveyed by drawing on ritual and liturgical metaphors to mirror its redemptive repleteness. Such is the case with the following comment by Soyinka in a context where he is clearly defending an African and Black metaphysics:

Nothing rescues man...from loss of self...but a titanic resolution of the will....

On the arena of the living, when man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts...have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of [an abyss/void], he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will (1978, 149)

Ritual drama is not the only medium where modern art, theory, and philosophy have tried to detotalise reductionism and nihilism. Speech, as I remarked earlier, can mirror properties which alert us to the limitations of sign representation. Such is the case in ethnic cultures and art forms where, while not completely rejecting writing (after all, according to Senghor, a non-Western civilisation invented writing), Man is still in awe at the power of utterance. Thus in Yoruba sacred art, speech acts can trigger and transmit that which cannot be adequately textured in spatialised representation. It is a dynamics of speech which supplements and outstrips the referential possibilities of mere writing. The same goes for other forms of representing human consciousness. In her exploration of the significance of Ogun in Yorubaland and Brazil, Margeret Thompson Drewal notes, "The power of utterances has been widely documented in Africa" (Barnes, 199), and, "That Yoruba acknowledge a relationship between the dynamics of speech and the dynamics of action is evident in their verbal characterizations of dance"(202). She points out, "If oral recitations possessing ase invoke supernatural forces, bring them into existence, and set them into action, then dance represents more literally the materialization of those forces in the world"(203). Dance, in Yoruba ritual, is yet another representation of consciousness that cannot be exhausted by empirical, spatialised figuration. Drewal's theoretic concerns here regarding dance as 'consciousness in motion' is intended to focus the reader on a structure of knowledge that enables us to see the body in sacred choreography as worthy of critical attention, though she realises

writing can only try to describe the dynamics of this other aspect of reality. According to her:

Dance is an integral part of African ritual. Addressing metaphysical beings or powers, it is a poetic, non-verbal expression continually created and re-created by countless performers/interpreters over generations. In its formulations of time, space, and dynamics, dance transmits a people's philosophy and values; it is thought embodied in human action. A primary vehicle for communicating with the spirit realm, it is at the same time perceived to be an instrument of the gods through which they communicate with the phenomenal world. As such, ritual dance is an unspoken [unwritten] essay on the nature and quality of metaphysical power. Indeed, for the Yoruba, dance-in certain contexts-is metaphysical force actualized in the phenomenal world.(199, emphases added)

Thus, the idea of language that Pickstock is trying to reinstate to Western theories of speech (and writing), minus its Christian bias, is one that has always been part of traditional Black Africa. In such a construal of language, especially in ritual, the gap between the signifier and the signified is not too wide. This, then, is the same problematics that Ricoeur is dealing with in the above-mentioned essay. Understanding language thus conceived is helpful in understanding the nature of poetry as Senghor and Soyinka see it. Hence Soyinka's remark in *MLAW* that: "The nature of Yoruba music is intensely the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic, myth-embryonic "(147). Music is also consciousness in a different register. And when the Yoruba say this, they are not just paying lip-service to the power of music as a phenomenon. Ritual music (African, aboriginal North- and South-American, Australian, etc.) is more than a cacophony of sounds. Modern theory needs the tool to completely decode its essence. For example, Soyinka further states about the idiom of sacred music:

Language in Yoruba tragic music....undergoes transformation through myth into a secret (masonic) correspondence with the symbolism of tragedy, a symbolic medium of spiritual emotions....It transcends particularisation (of meaning) to tap the tragic source whence spring the familiar disruptive melodies. This masonic union of sign and melody, the true tragic music, unearths cosmic uncertainties which pervade human existence, reveals the magnitude and power of creation, but above all creates a harrowing sense of omni-directional vastness where the creative Intelligence resides and prompts the soul to futile exploration....(1978, 148, emphases added)

Writing in ancient Egypt and traditional Yoruba mythology/culture did not originate as a result of a Cartesian split of subject and object that goes on to reify the spatialization of reality into an absolutist self-sufficiency. This is the point Richard H. Wilkinson is making when he observes:

the hieroglyphic signs form the very basis of Egyptian iconography, which was concerned with the function of making specific symbolic statements through pictorial rather than written means....Above all, the hieroglyphic script was associated with Thoth, the ibis-headed god of wisdom who was regarded as the patron deity of the art of writing....In fact, the Egyptian hieroglyphics far transcended a simple system of communication and were regarded as symbolic entities which could function magically not only within written texts, but also in many aspects of what we, today, consider artistic representations. (149-152, *passim*)

Wilkinson's comments concur with Grégoire Kolpakch's hermeunetics of the Egyptian sign that identifies levels of meaning:

La compréhension de l'écriture égyptienne, prise en elle-même, ne mène nulle part. La sagesse de ce peuple étrange ressemble à un de ces châteaux forts du Moyen Age construits sous forme de fortifications concentriques superposées. La ceinture extérieure- les hiéroglyphes – une fois conquise, on se trouve en présence d'un second mur, encore plus formidable : celui du chiffre ésotérique (35, *emphasis added*).

Derrida's inadequate understanding of originary African philosophy as alterity to be mobilised to rethink Western logocentrism is also observable in many Black intellectuals. For example, when original Black writers thematise speech or writing as new and challenging registers, metaphysically alienated Westerners and culturally alienated Blacks complain that the works are 'not Black enough,' meaning, not cheaply exotic enough, or not fiercely political enough. In other words, innovative Black literature is condemned by those who want to pigeon-hole it into stereotypical trivia, and by those who feel it departs from its 'normal' mandate as *littérature engagée*. The former is privately disturbed by the sophistication his delusion had caused him to hope Black artists did not have, while the latter is the product and victim of colonial education. The attempt by some to limit the Black writer to what they think Black literature should be is a

tactless and insincere move. Thus, for example, in his *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff*, Rudolph P. Byrd notes how "these assumptions have led to clashes in literary circles, the most famous of which is the thorough trashing that Irving Howe received at the pen/hand of Ralph Ellison" (56). Besides Ellison's understandable indignation at being patronised, Toomer himself often lashed out at such pigeon-holing. I will return to this issue in detail in the chapters on fiction and literary theory.

Black Africa and the Black Diaspora: The Necessary Complementarity

The Black Diaspora's relationship with Africa is, at a deep level, an ontological one, so natural and necessary, in spite of its ups and downs, that it does not always have to be didactically posited. Africa will always 'sneak' into the texture of Black diaspora discourse, and African references to and acknowledgements of the Diaspora's importance in African affairs will always insinuate themselves into African writing. Since the two traditions complement each other in profound ways, one often surges in the other even if the author does not consciously intend this. And so, Africa remains implicitly or overtly a constant in the Diaspora's theories and narrativisations of the self, to some extent regulating the deep structures of its discourses in their search for an authentic and adequate order of knowledge within which to ground the ethnic self in exile. The effect of the ambivalent status (citizen/non-citizen) of the Blacks in the Americas threatens the subjectivity with disintegration, the way the disseminated sign frames subjectivity or the referent for obliteration. Where most Black lives in the Americas border on despair, memory (yet another medium for imaging and grasping reality) takes over through its refusal to evacuate its cultural past. It refuses to be denied continuity. The subjectivity's historicisation of itself through a genealogical re-insertion into time and space is here an existential affirmation that there is more to it as

subjectivity than conservative American discursive constructions allow. Recently, events in Cornell West's private life rekindled his awareness of discontinuities in his apprehension of himself across time. West wonders in *Keeping Faith*:

How do I understand my African American tradition and sense of black homelessness in America? Who is the "I" or "me" that has emerged out of a particular black family, church and neighborhood, a white academy, a multicultural American mass communication network, and a set of progressive political organizations?.... Africa does have a special appeal to me that Asia or America lack.... Rather it is a matter of whether one's exilic and experimental life as a New World African is worth living in the present-day United States. (X-XVI, *passim*)

And Paget Henry avers:

If Caribbean existentialism is to be fully aware of itself and embrace its own historical formation [s]pecial attention must be given to the African roots of this discourse, as they have been grossly overlooked in the past. Stronger links need to be established with existential thinking in contemporary Africa. In my view, Afro-Caribbean existential philosophy will not achieve the self-consciousness it requires without a fuller coming to terms with its African roots. In doing so, it will not only creolize itself, but also the larger discourse of Caribbean philosophy.¹⁴

The subjectivity enunciating each of these propositions searches for an adequate ontological grounding through the acknowledgement of an onto-epistemological lacuna in itself, and by heeding a voice which bids it seek authenticity and genuine fulfilment in discourses of origination. It is a process that involves going back in time in search of one's self. If Pickstock is right in arguing that "the modern/postmodern debate is empty shadow-boxing, since nihilism is but the most extreme expression of a humanist rationalism" (48), such a paradigm (absolutist rationalism) is most suited to the articulation of an invisible man, of a subjectivity cast adrift in a sea of signs where Blackness equals nullity. This is not the ground on which to bring into being the new DBSC Black subjective agency as presence. Being cast adrift in time without an anchor in a sense of origins, or being forced to think this way, has not only unnerved some Black communities, it has degraded them. Original thought in Black philosophy will not come about necessarily through an endorsement of the latest developments in Western philosophy or High Theory. Generally, the Black critic is faced with a delicate equation

of grounding discourse: race, nation, etc. on the one hand, and universality and the latest Western High Theory, on the other. How a critic argues his or her way through this doublebind of ethnicity (essentialism) and tricky High Theory is often a measure of his or her intellectual maturity.

What Sandra Adell has in common with West and Paget is precisely the ability to ground discourse in some ancient and time-tested essence. However, in her otherwise informative reading of the crisis in Black critical theory, Adell appears to have surmounted the doublebind only by mainly relativising (virtually evacuating it, really) tradition and urging innovation. She goes a little too far, for she seems to suddenly perceive an identitarian void at the core of her *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*. Because she almost completely displaces race and tradition, cultural situatedness is in effect de-emphasised in her project. She then almost reverses course, for she suddenly grounds the thesis of her book by anchoring it to Yoruba mythology. Adell devotes more than a hundred and thirty pages to a sustained stricture on tradition and essence. Yet, in the last two pages she posits an alternative theory of Black subjectivity through a recovery of the Yoruba mythic figure Atunda. Depending on how one reads her, this move could constitute a terminal antithesis that undermines her book. This observation is reinforced by the fact that she chooses not to really elaborate on the dynamics of Yoruba philosophy as it might redirect Black critical theory (136-137). Paget is relevant here, because his recent recuperation of philosophic debate in Africa for the Americas is a remarkably candid Caribbean instance of very recent intellectual efforts to (re)formulate a Pan-African structure of Black identity. By contrast, Sandra Adell is featured as a case of what happens when Black critical theory too hastily endorses what is essentially a postmodernist decentering of identity, while at the same time suggesting the viability of ethnic ontology. It is possible to pull it off, though the effort can also quickly become

inconsistent. Adell did not prepare the reader for her summative declaration of belonging, because she does not appear to have invested the same amount of time (or interest) into researching authentic African orders of knowledge and being as she did in mastering high theory. As I hope to show later, in St. Clair Drake's reading of Egypt and Africa in relation to Black America, we see an example of the kind of revisionist intellectual work on which philosophic and literary debates can build.

This thesis is not exclusively a reading of three novels either. Rather, mindful of the socio-philosophical grounding of discourse, it is a balanced evocation of a particular development in Black critical discourse, and of how such a development is amenable to literary prognostication. As such, the subjective agency it tries to theorise is one that even postcolonial theory does not adequately address. For example, this subjective agency is not Homi Bhabha's excessively disseminated urban (and postcolonial?) subjectivity which shows "how newness enters the world" (228).¹⁵ Given the continued legitimisation of high theory in spite of its now proven misreading of philosophy and history, the thesis attempts a theory of fictional and critical subjectivity, by first laying the historiographic and philosophic foundation for reading the novels, prompted by the kinds of concern which make Nancy Hartsock write in exasperation:

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be theorized. Just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of systematically and rationally organizing human society become dubious and suspect. Why is it only now that critiques are made of the will to power inherent in the effort to create theory? (Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 163-164)

My thesis also acknowledges recent efforts to problematise the concept of Blackness and the relevance of Africa to the politics of Black identity in the Black diaspora. However, its focus in the general area of Black critical theory is on that faction that still upholds the viability of an organic, cross-Atlantic racial discourse: Pan-

Africanism. This is the genealogical framework the thesis defends, with special emphasis on the perceived continuity between Negroid Africa and ancient Egypt. As I suggested in the opening statements of this dissertation, various pronouncements have recently been made about the illusion of a monolithic Black identity. The authors of these pronouncements are entitled to their views. I am interested in revisiting W.E.B. DuBois's, Marcus Garvey's, Padmore's, and Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism in the twenty-first century, though, again, my interest is more philosophic and literary. The disagreements between the highly educated DuBois and the 'uncouth' and 'idealist' Garvey are rather unfortunate instances of divergence, but the ethnic agenda, at least at that particular time in the history of African-Americans, most Afro-Caribbeans, and Black Africans, was essentially the same, as would confirm (the irony of) DuBois's decision to relocate to Africa – the 'jazzy' and 'unsophisticated' Garvey being credited as one of the originators of the Back-to-Africa idea. I will, therefore, try to avoid the kind of outright de-essentialisation of Blackness that plays into the hands of conservative Western scholarship. Ideologically, my thesis will be mindful of an era of calculated and almost wanton problematisation which makes Toni Morrison, rather like Nancy Hartsock above, point out this hard, beautiful truth:

For three hundred years black Americans insisted that "race" was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During those same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted "race" was *the* determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as "race," biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it. (Wonham, *Desegregating*, 16-29, emphasis added)

The concept of the reawakening or the resurrection of the ethnic subject and of the Sign, as against the essentially necrophiliac signs which have so far represented Blackness, underpins my approach. As stated above, the liturgical or ritualistic modality or exploration such a concept will often require in order to really make sense is not an

obstacle here. It is the appropriate register for my ultimately literary argument. The artists and intellectuals who are trying to make a new sense of Africa and Blackness argue, in different registers, that Africa, like a historical Lazarus, now appears to have defied death. This is the essence of Armah's, Brodber's, Senghor's, Soyinka's works. Appropriately, therefore, Chapter 4, where I turn to literature proper, will draw significantly on the story *par excellence* of the will's victory over inimical forces: the story of Osiris and its cosmic as well as intellectual and ideological significance. The thesis is divided into five chapters, themselves sequentially indicative of the orientation, implications, and consequences of the DBSC discourse for critical theory.

Chapter I: Discourses of Africa in the West is about the invented image that is Africa, as subjectivity, in Western discourse. It describes a difference between the concrete geographical and cultural entity that has always been there shaping and reshaping itself, and the variety of deliberately grotesque distortions. I briefly read modern critical race theory backwards. I begin by quickly rehearsing the argument for the non-existence of racism in antiquity, then refer to the favourable view in antiquity of "Ethiopians" as pious people associated with Egypt where Blackness was nothing unusual. I then show how a valence was introduced in the representation of Africa when classical authors resorted to grotesquerie in their efforts to figure the Blacks beyond Egypt (in sub-Sahara Africa). I quickly move on to the critical period of late modernity when, plotting the enslavement of Africans and needing a justification, a racist Euro-American cultural imperialism turned to its academics and produced a variety of theses to the effect that there was nothing African about Egypt. This development was roughly contemporaneous with the emergence in European philosophy of the extreme Otherness of the African which led to a systematic, intellectual 'whitening' of the Negro-African origins of Egyptian and Greek thought. This indirect invention and essentialisation of race was the epistemological condition that later made colonisation possible. I argue the centrality of Descartes, Hegel, and Kant to critical race theory. To

point out that humankind has progressed (and, at other times, dangerously regressed) over the millenia since its emergence in Africa is one thing no thinking person will deny; to deliberately erase Africa's contribution to this human civilisation, is a travesty of historical truth.

Chapter II: The Dakar-Brazzaville-Stanford Conversation (DBSC) as I interpret it here is, ultimately, about the new Black subjectivity authoring the history of philosophy. I also provide clarification to the effect that the ultimate message of the DBSC discourse is the continuity and interdependence of cultures. This is what Senghor means when, quoting Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in *Ce Que Je Crois*, he advocates " la Civilisation de l'Universel". This interdependence is also the object of Soyinka's comment in *MLAW* that: " to ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent" (XII). Further, I suggest that the best that Africa has offered the world has yet to be fully formulated in writing, for it transcends this medium. Cartesian philosophy and its offshoots, aspiring to *l'Absolu*, see writing as the medium *par excellence* for representing reality. African philosophy, which actually invented writing (Thoth, Esu.), is far more circumspect. I try to show the difficulty in appropriating Descartes, Hegel, Kant, and Derrida to theorise the new Black subjectivity, by arguing that the life-affirming, liturgical, and doxological essence of eudaemonistic Egyptian philosophy is profoundly at odds with the cumulative product of Western philosophy: postmodernism and deconstruction. The Cartesian subject-object split was the precursor to the racist self-Other subtext of Hegel's philosophy of history and religion. Following Pickstock (Chapter 1, "The Mediations of Egypt "), I try to show that Derrida's entire philosophy of writing is based on his deliberate or unwitting distortion of the nature and role of Thoth in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Hegel and Derrida are thus imbricated with ancient Egypt, but for the wrong reasons: the distortion of originary myths in order to

posit the absolutism of the *Geist* and the *Absolute Spirit* (absolutist, because both concepts were formulated independently of Africa and Egypt; Africa and Egypt were inconsequential to their realisation in Hegel's Christology); and in order (for Derrida) to conceive of and deploy the written Sign as necessarily an unmitigated Fall. If the reader recasts, or restructures, Pickstock's and Hare's books (the sequence of the chapters) in his or her mind, a clearer mythochronology emerges which confirms the primacy of Egypt and Negroid Africa in the history of religion and philosophy. I discuss Diop, Obenga, Senghor, Soyinka, Malika Hachid, and others as a way of rethinking spirituality and philosophy.

Chapter III: Connections Outside Africa: The Black Americas theorises the new psycho-cultural diaspora subjectivity in the intellectual redeployment of the Pan-African ideal which much of DuBois's writing and decision to relocate to Africa exemplified. Here, I discuss the psycho-socio-cultural nature of the Black diaspora's relation to Africa. To discuss this is not to patronise the diaspora and dispute its own distinctness as a northern hemisphere community, but to highlight what is African in "Afro-American," "Afro-Canadian," "Afro-Cuban," etc, not only in name, but very much in substance as well. This is, essentially, the view Angela Davis recently expressed in the following remark:

As African-American literary, visual, and performing artists -- and critics as well -- would later realize, African-American religious practices based in the West African and especially Yoruba religion permeate the culture as a whole. The articulation of a specifically black aesthetic-the announced aim of the Harlem Renaissance-cannot locate itself in the living tradition of African-American culture without taking seriously [African belief-systems]. (159)

Again, the reality of having an ambivalent status that limits one's subjectivity in the Americas produces a degree of despair that threatens this Black subjectivity with disintegration. Where, for many, daily life continues to be desperate or brutal, memory palliates the debilitating effects of this identitarian ambivalence and economic

disadvantage in the knowledge that there is more to this subjective agency than the official texts of the white Americas claim. Here, through a refusal to evacuate its historical consciousness, subjectivity refuses to be denied continuity in time and space. This sense of continuity is present in some of the poems of the Afro-Cuban writer Nicolas Guillen:

Yoruba soy, lloro en yoruba lucimi.
 Como soy un yoruba de Cuba,
 quiero que hasta Cuba suba mi llanto yoruba,
 que suba el alegre llanto yoruba
 que sale de mi.
 Yoruba soy,
 cantando voy,
 llorando estoy,
 y cuando no soy yoruba,
 soy congo, mandinga, carabali.

(I am a Yoruba, I cry in Cuban Yoruba.
 Since I am a Yoruba from Cuba,
 I want my Yoruba tears to spread to Cuba,
 I want the happy Yoruba tears
 Emanating from me to spread, to rise.
 I am a Yoruba,
 I am singing, continually,
 I am crying,
 And when I am not a Yoruba,
 I am from the Congo, I am from Calabar.¹⁶

Lamentation, which is essentially what we are dealing with in Guillen's poem, is a response to homelessness, which produces a semiosis or poetics of exile. On why he found it irresistible to produce his informative two-volume work on ancient Egypt, St. Clair Drake argues the necessity of the Black subject's ability to insert itself in a genealogical continuity as a precondition for the ability to contest white America's manipulation of history and signs:

Crucial in the Afro-Americans' coping process has been their identification, over a time span of more than two centuries, with ancient Egypt and Ethiopia as symbols of black initiative and success long before their enslavement on the plantations of the New World. Great myths are always part of group-coping strategies (vol. 1, XV)

Chapter IV: Pan-African(ist) Narrative Intersubjectivity in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Osiris Rising*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Erna Brodber's *Myal*

In this chapter, I discuss and try to account for Africa's image in the fiction of the Black diaspora, and the image of this diaspora in African fiction. I am particularly interested in how Armah explicitly makes these two Black subjectivities interact with and acknowledge each other. I try to see if these images can be explained in phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and historical terms. The chapter briefly reads three writers who are not only fairly representative of the Black world but, more importantly perhaps, each of whom has written at least one classic in Black literature. They bring their craftmanship to the textualisation of the other, vertical, Black subjectivity – as against the horizontal, linear, modern, and truncated one. Black cultural theory is incomplete without an engagement of ancient Egypt. Thus Black Egyptology explicitly features in Armah's and Brodber's novels. Because these three novelists are among the few Black writers who completely understand Africa and/or Blackness – or come close to doing so –, in the specific context of my thesis I read their novels as allegories of African and Black history. I discuss them as works of art which reconfigure and redescribe Africa and Blackness with the paradoxical result that art/the Novel becomes more accurate than the 'reality' of (reductive) history. In addition to what I say in Chapter II about the ontology of spoken and memorised versus written representations, this chapter is where I mobilise the concept of liturgy, as used by Catherine Pickstock or Soyinka. Against what is now increasingly seen as a deliberate Western misrepresentation of Africa, akin to Pickstock's "sophistic manipulation of language irrespective of truth" (40), I see the essence of fiction and creative imagination as a liturgical conception of the Word; one in which the still emerging alternative idea of Africa is inscribed within an open and optimistic outlook. This particular modern reconceptualisation of language based on originary African theories of the *grammata* is

what Pickatock calls "the ultimate character [of language] as an expression of liturgy" (46). Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), published during the first phase of the Harlem Renaissance, is a *summa* in his personal search for identity, a comprehensive statement and a harrowing quest, rightly rated as one of the finest works of the Harlem Renaissance, due to its particular lyrical and aesthetic representation of identity. Toomer brings to the representation of identity a rare talent and a haunting soulfulness. One would have been wrong in thinking that, by turning to experimental writing, Toomer had renounced his partly Black ancestry. One would be wrong in thinking this, because by somewhat stepping outside the template of poetics as most artists of the Harlem Renaissance practised it, Toomer was, ironically, being more Black and African in a specific sense that I will argue. This is because *Cane* ultimately enables other, richer, though disappearing, sites of Black agency in the vignettes the novel offers about life in the South before industrialisation. Toomer was groping for something more ancient and everlasting about Black people, but the structures or properties of mimetic narrativisation were inadequate to carry his new sensibility. Regarding the Surrealist suggestiveness of his 'novel', however, Toomer was only vaguely aware of Africa's contribution to Surrealism and the very long history behind this different way of harnessing the unconscious. Erna Brodber's *Myal* enacts a metamorphosis of Black consciousness by helping her protagonists find the ancient river of their lives and culture and letting themselves be carried by them, as Sharon Butala would put it. This process is narrated against a background of the collision between Christianity and Afro-Caribbean belief-systems, an essentially Caliban-Prospero thematics. The metamorphosis is codified into the text, first by deconstructing, fragmenting, and putting back together reality for the protagonists in order to pare away layers of negative accretion and illusion in perception and, for the young Ella, by honing understanding of how language works. The novel's intricate pattern narrativises the protagonist's stratified identity by playing on an innate

spirituality and a wariness toward Christianity's universalist claims. Though Brodber's insight could be construed as transcending both systems of belief and values, it is the African continuities (philosophy, spirituality, dance, and other non-linguistic modes of imaging and apprehending reality which were difficult to erase from the slave's consciousness), brought to bear on a broader and deeper understanding of the dynamics of modern Jamaican society, which enable the protagonists to arrive at a heightened sense of consciousness. *Myal*, thus, brings innovative *reenchantment* to the Caribbean novel through its Surrealist meditation on consciousness. Further, there is a Caribbean tradition of Egyptology; and it finds its way into Brodber's novel together with such Black African religious rituals (drumming, ritual possession, etc.) as we see at Miss Gatha's tabernacle. What happens to a people when circumstances converge to induce amnesia and make it forget or underestimate the profound meanings of its own foundational myths and texts? In six demanding novels whose publication sequence narrates Africa backwards, Ayi Kwei Armah proposes an answer. In the twentieth-century, the African novel was revolutionised, innovated, at least four times (by at least four writers); and Armah was among those who practised this experimental writing. With the 1968 publication of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah thundered onto an African literary scene which needed an original innovation that would reconceptualise the territory of the novel. For example, African literature had not yet fully developed a novelistic tradition that could see the cultural relevance of ancient Egypt. Armah's first three novels – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Why Are We So Blest*, and *Fragments* – are collectively essentially an anatomy of neocolonial mentality. By the time *Two Thousand Seasons* was published (1979), Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) had revolutionised the structure of the African narrative. But *Two Thousand Seasons* was a literary event in its own right, for here the socio-political observing author of the previous novels dons or assumes the stance of the *djéli* (the griot) and offers a broader

view of the historical causes of modern Africa's problems. *Two Thousand Seasons* gives a vast panoramic view of the past and is narrated in an epic register that befits *djéli* orature's primary concern with a people's, clan's, or family's genealogy and memory. As fiction written in modern Africa, it revolutionised the African novel by going, as it were, in the opposite direction from *The Interpreters*: it rethought the tone and language of the African novel by inflecting it to accommodate the vernacular of the oral tradition. It is another bold Africanisation of the Novel since Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. With its ultimate focus on the mind and the soul but, in effect, beginning where *Two Thousand Seasons* left off, *The Healers* rides on a set of somatic concepts and metaphors. Armah diagnoses social pathology and suggests a way out. *Osiris Rising* is yet another move to new pastures. Here, Armah, the *djéli* turned hierophant, thematises the divine, creative, and redemptive Word and Sign and helps the inscribed reader or theorist recover the profound meaning of originary ancient African signal and verbal representation, as urged by Blachère. As a fount to be tapped by Black literary theory, *Osiris Rising* is a timely fictional intervention at a time when many, in the West and elsewhere, are tempted to speak of the death of High Theory. This perceived waning vitality of Euro-American High Theory is what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his contribution to Ralph Cohen's volume, means when he writes:

As deconstruction and other structuralisms or even as a-racial Marxism, and other 'articles of faith in Euro-Judaic thought' exhaust themselves in a self-willed racial never-never land in which we see no true reflections of our black faces and hear no echoes of our black voices, let us—at long last—Master the critical traditions and languages of Africa and Afro-America. (345)

Each of Armah's novels could be usefully construed as the conjugation of the verb "to be" or "to be Black" in a different tense. It is a process which the (verb) tense in the title of the sixth novel is meant to indicate. My thesis considers *Osiris Rising* as Armah's *magnum opus*, the life key in his mainly sombre symphony which began in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* with a very unflattering portrayal of his native Ghana

and Africa. Armah's oeuvre so far already inscribes all three moments of liturgy (incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection) in its narrativisation of Africa as consciousness in its harrowing encounters with the Judeo-Christian and Islamic worlds. The type of mythic structure within which this mainly modern story is subsumed requires that we grasp the cosmic significance of Asar's self-sacrifice as the triumph of good over local and foreign evil. Armah's sixth novel thus registers some sense of closure by deftly capturing and making the achievement of plenitude believable. Again, it does this through the deployment of an authentically African archetype that has inspired the world. *Osiris Rising* is, thus, a liturgical consummation of the rise of the Black novelistic "I". More than in any of Armah's previous novels, characters in *Osiris Rising* slip in and out of different levels of consciousness, and novelistic narration is thus an imbrication, intersection, of various modes of onto-epistemological awareness and identity. The three novels I read, therefore, go beyond the predictions, territory, and depth covered by Shatto Arthur Gakwandi's *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, Robert A. Bone's *The Negro Novel in America*, and Kenneth Ramchand's *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature*, to take just a few examples. Given that discussion of Armah's novel is only part of what is roughly a three-tiered thesis, what I offer here is not a detailed reading of *Osiris Rising*.¹⁷ Also, I do not attempt a strictly balanced reading of all three novels. I engage *Cane* and *Myal* rather tangentially, comparing and contrasting only particular sections of them with *Osiris Rising*; and I do so at very different points in my thesis. My overall reading of *Osiris Rising* does not use this contrapuntal approach. Instead, I read the novel first as epic, then as tragedy, – to be precise, as redemptive tragedy.

Chapter V: The Future of Black Literary Theory

By and large, Black African postcolonial theory has yet to satisfactorily respond to the challenge contained in Diop's observation that from the day the first Western coloniser set foot in Africa, the continent has been frozen in time and, as we will see, to Soyinka's remark that there has not been a lot of original thought in theorising Black African subjectivity. The language of current postcolonial theory in Africa and elsewhere simply lacks the phenomenological depth to describe the soul and consciousness of Blackness -- and of Egyptian mysticism, for that matter. On a related note, there are passages in the Bible which even Christians do not properly understand: the Yoruba concept of *ase* helps understand the concept of the divine Word and the Eucharist cannot be fully understood without knowledge of Black African ritual meals and, later in the northward progression of Black African culture, in Osiris's injunctions to his followers, as we will see in my discussion of Diop later. Understanding Judeo-Christian liturgy requires familiarity with pagan Black African ritual and mysticism. The end of time that Carruthers, Stephen Jay Gould, and others speak of, could be adapted to mean the end of Western time, partly effected by the rise of 'African time.' Africa has yet to be fully philosophically restored to the normal temporality that had carried it from the beginning of time, through protohistory and prehistory, before this time was interrupted by slavery and colonisation. Of course, Gould and the others are not suggesting that we literally go back to the way we were; neither am I in my thesis. Yet the regime of language and thematics which still regulates most of African postcolonial theory is mainly socio-political. It falls short of the radical overhauling of critical perspective needed to enrich discourse and reposition Africa in history and philosophy. If I read Madhava Prasad correctly, he is acknowledging the epistemological inadequacy of postcolonial theory in general when he argues that: "A theory of (Third) World literature cannot be produced from any available position."¹⁸ In the book-length case he makes for postpositivism (also

an essentially postcolonial project), Satya P. Mohanty comes closer to the phenomenological issue in the following comment:

In the postpositivist realist perspective, for instance, plausible and empirically grounded theories about human nature or aesthetic and moral value are indeed attempts to trace the contours of our world, but they are not idealist speculations about the essence of nature. Instead, they are sober and reasonable attempts to explain the variety of causal relations and dependencies that define human reality. Thus they can provide suggestive hypotheses for social inquiry and textual interpretation. (252)

Though the prospect of formulating an African metaphysics –i. e., *nommer le réel africain* -- looks promising, Michael J. C. Echeruo still has reason to observe that: “We have yet to develop adequate theoretical tools by which to read our own writing” (7). Echeruo’s essay is but a brief *constatation de fait*, i.e., it essentially only acknowledges the problem. The effort to theorise Black literature more adequately begins also with refamiliarising ourselves with our roots in language. Through this, a recentering of a Black contribution and specificity in world literary theory can be effected. The process has only gained momentum with what this thesis has pointed out so far. On this issue, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, made the following memorable assertion:

The Eurocentric bias presupposed in the ways terms such as canon, literary theory, or comparative literature have been utilized is a culturally hegemonic bias, a bias that the study of literature could best do without. Europeans and Americans neither invented literature and its theory nor have monopoly on its development. (XIV)

By exploring the dynamics and archetypal figures of Yoruba and other Black sign systems, Gates, in *The Signifying Monkey*, indicates where promising research could be done. My thesis has been arguing that Yoruba culture is but a part of a cultural entity which reached its zenith in Egypt. This chapter tries to flesh out how literary theory is enhanced by such a broadening of cultural space and self-consciousness, thanks to a process of self-recovery and self-reinvention initiated by the DBSC. The recovery and rethinking of the archetypes and concepts involved can also help one think about issues of referentiality (fictional and theoretic) as part of identity-formation.

Conclusion

By focussing on literary theory (instead of literary criticism as in previous chapters), my thesis reiterates, through a more concrete re-historicisation and deconstruction of Hegel and Derrida, its central argument that the ancient Egypt debate is indispensable to a reformulation of Black literary theory.

1. Discourses of Africa in the West

Representations of Africa

A second but slightly detailed resituation of the DBSC and its figures may be in order at this junction before I go on to discuss the philosophical significance of this mode of Black discourse. In fact, much of this resituating touches on the persistently pernicious images of Blackness even today in the West. Due to the important role of the biblical tradition to its culture and thanks to its more extensive exposure and access to modern writing, the Black Diaspora raised the issue of a Black Egypt earlier than did Diop. However, it is mainly thanks to Diop that the topic has been inscribed in world historiography. As should have been expected, Diop's aspiration to nothing less than a complete decolonisation of historiographic discourse as regards, specifically, the origin of the first inhabitants of Egypt and the significance of their role in the glory of Egyptian culture, does not sit well with conservative Western historiography which has been unwilling to credit Diop's theses. I am referring to that school of historiography which persists in completely dissociating ancient Egypt from Black Africa and, as a result, placing Egypt in Oriental Studies. The sheer extent to which conservative Western critics have gone to systematically devalue Diop's work raises suspicion. The Sorbonne gave him his doctorate, but with a clause stating that he could not teach. Once he returned to Senegal, local and foreign forces are believed to have made sure he did not teach at what was then known as Université de Dakar.¹ As a result, Diop did not have the chance to point more students to alternative accounts of History.

Hamid Zayed's article "Egypt's Relations With the Rest of Africa" which appears in the same volume as Diop's "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians" makes for interesting reading; but its claim of the uniqueness of the ancient Egyptians does not satisfactorily address the question of the origin and colour of the original inhabitants of Egypt. In effect then, Zayed's Egyptians 'happened' *ex nihilo*. His own words are not very reassuring:

Whatever the thesis adopted concerning the ancient people of Egypt, there is apparently considerable chronological and technological discrepancy between the latter and its peripheral civilizations. Even though it is technically part of Africa, Egyptian culture detached itself from its western and southern environment. Egypt obviously distrusted its northern neighbours still more when they became a threat. Culturally, Pharaonic Egypt felt out of step with its neighbours. That it outpaced them is certain, but why it did so is difficult to see (Mokhtar, *General History*, emphases added, 137)

Stephen Howe's *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes* is fairly representative of the virulent detraction of Diop. The problem with Howe is that he is unable to make a really cogent case as to why Diop is wrong about the earliest inhabitants of Egypt:

Diop's work was evidently badly flawed by its reliance on out-of-date sources, a tendency which deepened, as he grew older. As Augustin Holl remarks, right up to his death Diop 'behaved as if nothing new had occurred in African archeology in general, and especially in West African archeology, history, linguistics, and social anthropology.' (167)

As I will later show when I contrast Mary Lefkowitz's and François-Xavier Fauvelle's methodologies, a lot of new things have occurred... in our understanding of the politics of Western historiography.

The work of another Westerner, Fauvelle, is instructive here for it pays close attention to ideology in historiography in general, a factor too often not rigorously examined by Diop's detractors. His *L'Afrique de Cheikh Anta Diop*, a critique of Diop's entire oeuvre, is offered as "une approche critique globale," something which, Fauvelle argues, had been lacking. He points out the seminal importance of Diop's works by

observing that their total effect is to have brought about a serious rethinking of the African factor by historians. Fauvelle confirms that though others have sporadically argued the Africanness of Egypt, the credit goes to Diop for a sustained rehistoricisation which posits a new African identity that argues, as we will also see in Armah's *Osiris Rising*, continuity where Western historiography maintains blindspots and discontinuities in the African historical agency (41). In addition to popularising this new historical vision Diop, according to Fauvelle, can be credited with enunciating, as does *Osiris Rising*, an African temporality in historical discourse; one which is significantly different from the Judeo-Christian and colonial temporality of African history:

L'historicité retrouvée de l'Afrique n'est en somme pas autre chose qu'une mise en ordre du temps africain, sa soumission à une séquence passé-présent-avenir....La colonisation est vue par Diop comme une suspension du temps qui a tout bloqué (évolutions, échanges), tout figé (institutions)....Pendant la colonisation, les Africains n'existent plus....la restauration de la vérité sur l'Égypte «Nègre» [est] un optimisme....une philosophie de l'histoire qui restitue à l'Afrique une historicité, une continuité, une temporalité propres; un regard qui modifie non seulement sa profondeur mais aussi son étendue (42-52, passim)

To Fauvelle, besides systematising what others already but incoherently said about the Black Africa-ancient Egypt connection, Diop's very particular extension of the debate is his credible body of evidence establishing a link between Black African languages and ancient Egyptian. What Fauvelle refers to as " le schéma de pensée proprement diopien" (56) is a set of historical continuities, at the core of Diop's oeuvre, establishing Africa's contribution to civilisation. Hence, Fauvelle 's decision to touch on the conspiracy theory in Diop's work, what Fauvelle calls "complot transatlantique."

Fauvelle finds it difficult to disagree completely with Diop, again, because, unlike Lefkowitz and Howe, he realises that there is a real culture war for or against cultural and theoretic pluralism here between a conservative Western historiographic tradition which has no intention of relinquishing its hold on and hegemony toward African history, and a new generation of African and Black intellectuals equally set on ending this

monopoly. In other words, it is the site of enunciation – i.e., the question of who controls language and reality -- that is at stake. In Fauvelle 's words, it is about “exprimer l'aspiration fort légitime [de jeunes intellectuels africains] à occuper (quitte à les créer) des lieux d'énonciation des savoirs concernant l'Afrique....Cheikh Anta Diop n'aura pas seulement contribué a décoloniser l'histoire, mais également l'institution académique” (86-87, passim). In *Loose Canons*, Gates, referring to the United States, candidly states the matter thus:

Stated simply, the thrust of the pieces....is this: Ours is a late-twentieth-century world profoundly fissured by nationality, ethnicity, race, class, and gender. And the only way to transcend those divisions – to forge, for once, a civic culture that respects both differences and commonalities – is through education that seeks to comprehend the diversity of human culture. Beyond the hype and high-flown rhetoric is a pretty homely truth: There is no tolerance without respect – and no respect without knowledge. Any human being sufficiently curious and motivated [i. e., sincere] can fully possess another culture, no matter how “alien” it may appear to be. (XV)

It is highly illusory to seek to decolonise literary theory by leaving intact, uncontested, the Western (and Arab) version of the origin of religious wisdom, and without touching on the significance of *The Book of the Dead* 's precedence over all three Abrahamic sacred texts and the literary significance of this book. This is why I am grounding my main chapter, on the future of Black literary theory, in a revisionist reading of ancient history. For it is simply impossible to properly situate and critique a figure like Derrida without pointing out his conditioned reading of ancient African myth and mysticism. Given how relevant his books are to this continent and to mysticism, Diop, more than any other commentator on historiography, is central to my project. This is why he deserves more coverage here than, say, Martin Bernal. As Fauvelle points out, whether it is deliberate or not, Diop never refers to Hegel. In Fauvelle's words, “Il est important de noter que Diop ne se réfère jamais, à notre connaissance, à Hegel, même pas pour le citer comme exemple de falsification” (87). Yet the spectre of Hegel on Black historiography and

literary theory cannot be adequately situated without realising how the West has managed to eternalise him in literary theory, making him *incontournable*.

Hegel's shadow on African and Black intellectual discourse brings us to some of Fauvelle's main reservations toward Diop. For according to Fauvelle, Diop may have fallen into an epistemological trap set by Hegel more than anyone else. To Fauvelle, Diop's attempt to rebut the West's (e. g. Hegel's) dissociation of Egypt from Black Africa achieves argumentative consistency mainly only at the "price" of postulating a racial essentialism and a homogeneity which are deployed to rehistoricise Africa organically. Fauvelle's objection is that a racial monolith forecloses an account of diversity of identity (skin colour and culture), i. e., the particularity of each African people. Fauvelle's real epistemological point is that monolithic essentialism makes each Black people or individual a representative bearer of what is characteristic (positively or negatively) of all Blacks. According to Fauvelle, this is unwittingly taking a bait set by a racist Western binarism (originating mainly in Hegel's black-white, Africa-Europe, savagery-civilisation postulates), a mere inversion of a racist Western bluff and oversimplification.

Some of Fauvelle's main objections are themselves not immune from criticism. It is not quite accurate to say that Diop merely reversed a faulty binarism. Diop can be said to have taken the premise or terms of his counterdiscourse from a tradition of which Hegel is representative, only in the sense that, given the virulence of Hegel's racism against Blackness and his slight preferential treatment of Egypt, Diop's decolonisation of historiography (to the effect that Blackness is not historylessness and nothingness; that there was an African element in ancient Egypt; and that Greece did borrow crucial ideas from that Egypt) does not really show a lack of sophistication by redeploying race. It would seem that to Diop, race/Blackness is not a concept to be ashamed of. The same observation applies to Fauvelle's objection to monolithic essentialism. It is indeed very likely that there was a time when the entire population of Africa, including ancient Egypt,

was basically Black, or not Black but with unmistakable negroid features. In fact, this is what, below, Senghor states about the *têtes rondes*. Much more to the point, it is important to remember that Diop and others are referring to the original inhabitants of Egypt. The point is worth emphasising, because Diop's detractors often craft their objections in a way that suggests Diop is referring to the colour of the Egyptians at the period when their culture peaked, by which time Egypt had been considerably racially (biologically) hybridised. The argument of those who are quick to point out that ancient Egyptians represented themselves as reddish-brown does not really invalidate Diop's argument either; it only reinforces his conviction of a double standard. Anyone in most Western countries today with just a drop of Black blood in him or her is categorised as Black, because it is convenient for the system to make the person feel how inadequate he or she is in relation to the white ideal. The same Western sociology and historiography argues that because at some time in the past Egyptians were reddish-brown or just brown, they were anything but Black!

At any rate, Fauvelle's own level-headed approach compels him to essentially reinstate Diop by the end of his book. He does this to make sure that the reader realises that, unlike other researchers (e.g., Lefkowitz and Howe), he is simultaneously aware of his own Western biases. Like Bernal, Fauvelle believes it is naïve to assume that academia -- i.e. even science -- is not ideologically tainted:

[L'] idéologie informe le discours sur la société, pouvant par exemple se focaliser sur la dimension historique, et organise également les représentations de celle-ci autour d'axes privilégiés: orientation, progrès ou décadence, début et fin de l'histoire.... Cette idéologie au sens politique est connexe d'une idéologie au sens large de conception du monde partagée par les membres de la collectivité. Cette conception du monde n'englobe pas seulement des images mais.... des *programmes de vérité*, c'est-à-dire les cadres qui informent la manière d'appréhender la vérité et les conditions sous lesquelles il est légitime de remettre en doute un énoncé. Ces programmes de vérité peuvent être multiples.... on «croit» ce que dit son père, son instituteur, la télévision, le scientifique, parce que cela ne «peut» pas être faux. Mais cette «impossibilité» est de divers ordres, comme nos intérêts, traversés d'enjeux qui conditionnent, selon des registres multiples, ce qu'on «sait», ce qu'on «croit» et ce qu'on ne «croit» pas.... De tels programmes existent également dans les sciences. (24)

Specifically on the Diopian historiography and its avowedly Pan-Africanist intent, Fauvelle concedes in one last summative evaluation of the rhetorical and argumentative merit of Diop's discourse and legacy:

C'est peut-être là le sens de l'oeuvre de Diop. La contre-histoire qu'il écrit ne communique pas que des savoirs, ne satisfait pas que la curiosité. Elle flatte certains sentiments. Et alors? Demandera-t-on. Qu'elle histoire serait assez désincarnée pour demeurer sans effet? Parce qu'elle trace, contre la raison coloniale, morcellante, les contours d'une nouvelle identité collective, parce qu'elle lisse des différences érigées en chaos par l'idéologie, parce qu'elle sonde la profondeur de ce qui n'était parcouru qu'en surface, elle convoque la fierté, rehausse la dignité, entretient l'espoir. Elle est pourvoyeuse de mobiles, de morale, de mots d'ordre. C'est donc autant une remise en ordre de l'histoire africaine qu'une reprise en main par les Africains (dont Diop veut être le porte-parole) du droit de parler soi-même de soi, de s'administrer à soi-même ses propres définitions, méthodes, valeurs. Avec Diop, ce n'est pas forcément la vérité qui a changé de camp, c'est le privilège d'énoncer sa vérité. Ce fait ne saurait être diminué, il possède une valeur propre. (178, emphases added)

Fauvelle is right to point out that one of Théophile Obenga's contributions to Egyptology is to have fleshed out in clear, easy-to-follow terms the theses of his mentor Diop by also reformulating them in light of recent understandings of the hidden politics of Western historiography. Dubbed by Elikia M'Bokolo (in his preface to Fauvelle's book) as the most faithful disciple of Diop and the most prolific heir and commentator of the Diopian historiographic tradition (9), Obenga has produced a steady number of books to demonstrate, arguably more systematically than Diop had time to do, the Black Africa-Egypt-Greece axis from a historian's perspective. Obenga's *La Philosophie Africaine de la Période Pharaonique: 2780-330 Avant Notre Ère* radically re-historicises Black African philosophic discourse by offering a new and comprehensive – because boldly diachronic – view of this tradition. This detailed book goes some way to counter K. Anthony Appiah's claim of the non-existence of a philosophic tradition in Africa.² Unlike Tom Hare, Obenga does not foreclose the possibility of recreating, adapting Egyptian philosophy as an intellectual discourse. Such a possibility is predicated on the ability to grasp the history of philosophy along the same trajectory as human evolution from Black

Africa, an approach Western anthologies of philosophy do not take. Obenga's *La Géométrie Égyptienne: Contribution de l'Afrique Antique à la Mathématique Mondiale* retells the history of mathematics. Both of Obenga's books (among many by him) can lay claim to a foundational status, to the extent that they reposition in time and space the history of African thought.

Obenga, like Diop, has argued that you cannot acknowledge Egypt's Africanity without ultimately, going back in time, having to acknowledge the Black African character of its aboriginal inhabitants. Western and Arab historiographies seem to have anticipated this argument, and have gone to extraordinary length to separate Egypt from Black Africa. Yet, in his eagerness to dissociate Obenga from Diop, Howe thinks Obenga sounds less radical and less sweeping in his claims. In spite of this, even Obenga is not good enough to Howe. To him, Obenga should be extolling the "brotherhood" and "equality" of human beings, instead of seeking to give Black Africa (through Egypt) credit for anything: "Obenga is, on the whole, less nakedly polemical in approach than Diop, and more fully prepared to espouse universalist rather than nationalist conceptions...Yet he too could come out with totalizing claims on behalf of ancient Egypt" (180). In his obstinacy to globalise and deracialise historiography, Howe is, of course, oversimplifying Obenga's position.

The title of St. Clair Drake's two-volume work immediately suggests the Pan-Africanist thrust of his work. In *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Drake deploys anthropological Egyptology to make the point (also made from a different perspective by Randall Robinson, as I show below) that there is more to the African-American's identity and consciousness, in spite of periodic identity crises. His appropriately Pan-Africanist message has to do with the new African-American, diasporic, Black, historical agency that his new temporalisation of African-American subjectivity formulates. Drake contributes to critical race theory by diachronically

situating and reformulating this recovered subjectivity through ridding it of accretions brought on by the register of mainstream American history and anthropology. Kevin Gaines's review of *Black Folk Here and There* situates in detail Drake's book in the context of the American Civil Rights movement, African history, and Black intellectual history:

At one level, *Black Folk Here and There* was Drake's meditation on the double-edged significance of what he called the "vindicationist" dimension of Black Studies. On the one hand, black scholars, confronted by segregation, exclusion, and the nonrecognition of their efforts, could not afford the luxury of detached scholarly inquiry. Accordingly, such vindicationism had served a necessary and valuable function as a critique of the illusory claims of objectivity and universalism made by American humanistic and social science scholarship, not to mention its outright racism. A "black perspective" was thus vital for the unmasking of the exclusionary and ideological biases of liberal academic canons. (2-9)

Gaines really believes that Drake "was challenging the racial assumptions propounded by liberal academics" (6). However, in his determination to achieve "transracial coalitions" (6) in the civil rights movement and to deploy a less virulent discourse in Egyptology than Afrocentricity, Drake is said to have opted for the thesis that the Egyptians were a racially mixed people. By contrast, Wyatt Macgaffey's review article "Who Owns Ancient Egypt?" (515-519) which reviews, among others, Drake's and Diop's works, points to what he sees as flaws and partiality in *Black Folk Here and There*. He argues that "Drake's knowledge of African history is now out of date, and the professional Egyptologist will find that he accepts many erroneous or at least dubious interpretations of historical events, Egyptian terms, and cultural influences" (518), and Macgaffey mentions how, according to Drake, DuBois had commented that impartiality is at times inevitable or desirable (518). Interestingly, Macgaffey himself appreciates the particularly unnerving position virtually all Blacks are in:

The bulk of the scholarly work about Africa that burdens our shelves takes for granted a distinction between 'civilised' and 'savage' calculated to flatter the European and white audience for whom it was written; it appropriates as Caucasian achievements any aspect of African culture recognized as civilized,

and represents the residue as a collective failure on the part of black people, attributable to cultural or genetic incompetence. Although modern scholarship repudiates much of this work, its effects are still with us; for example in every newspaper report that explains African disturbances as the result of 'tribal' animosities, implying that they are motivated by traditional rather than rational politics. It is only since about 1960 that the possibility of writing any history of Africa has been generally admitted. Secondly, people of African descent living or travelling in other continents are constantly subject to slights based on the assumption that they are culturally, if not genetically inferior, and that the oppression to which they have been subject in Africa and elsewhere was somehow deserved. (517)

Since even some of Drake's toughest critics appreciate the palpable effects of racism, devoting a lot of energy to finding out how the West might have misled the world about the significance of Black presence in ancient Egypt does not seem a misplaced endeavour. This is because the consequences of racism in historiography and critical theory are significant.

Senghor's *Ce Que Je Crois* has the merit of bringing a poetic perspective on Egyptology, and a very careful reading of it to a significant extent makes us more sympathetic to Négritudinist discourse. It makes us see Négritude in a broader, transhistoric, and ancient perspective, and goes a long way to clarify the movement's intents. In spite of this, there is a lingering scepticism, for there are moments in the book when one suspects that Senghor does have an inferiority complex. Written by a poet, *Ce Que Je Crois* gives a sense of what Carlyle had in mind when he wrote:

The history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history, political, scientific, religious. With all these the complete Historian of Poetry will be familiar: the national physiognomy, in its finest traits, and through its successive stages of growth, will be clear to him; he will discern the grand spiritual tendency of every period. (as quoted by Appiah, 52)

Unlike Carlyle's project (as seen by Appiah), Senghor's collection of essays is not racist. The book is interested in how and where poetic enunciation originated. Senghor correctly argues that this originary conception of poetry, because unknown to many, cannot be understood without a prior understanding of human evolution in Africa, and the cultural evolution that went with it. When Senghor writes: " A bien réfléchir, non

seulement l'Europe, mais encore l'Amérique et les autres parties du monde vivent encore, du moins en poésie, sur le modèle nègre," (219) he is giving an often unadmitted version of the history of art. Without what is generally referred to as "le modèle nègre," European modernism would not have been possible. And as I will later show, Soyinka's *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (to be referred to as *ADO*) details many of the unadmitted ways European art is indebted to Africa. And Michael Rice, below, tells us how indispensable Egyptian culture was to the Renaissance. The sheer erudition of *Ce Que Je Crois* seems to have intimidated many reviewers, rather like the way they have not yet quite properly situated *Osiris Rising* in critical discourse.

Misrepresentations of Africa: the Essentialisation of the Concept of 'Race'

The racialised image of Africa in the West, from late antiquity onward, conjures up a Black subjectivity which does not quite correspond to the real Africa as cultural entity. This is hardly surprising, for according to Soyinka, "Africa minus the Sahara North is still a very large continent, populated by myriad races and cultures. With its millions of inhabitants it must be the largest metaphysical vacuum ever conjured up for the purpose of racist propaganda." ³ At the inception of the concept of Europe's Others, systematic racism did not exist. For though fantastic tales were told of a distant non-European object called "Ethiopia" in the writings of Homer, Herodotus, Pliny, and other Greco-Roman authors, "Ethiopians" stood for wisdom and the ability to honour the gods, and the willingness to show the rest of humankind how to do so. Christopher L. Miller's *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* discusses this point in detail.

In ancient Egyptian, classical, and post-classical texts, as well as in the Old Testament, skin-colour did not trigger violent acts and value-judgements. For example,

slavery was not based on race, as most of the slaves in European antiquity were not Black. Blacks were not a rarity in North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean world: Greeks and Romans encountered them in Pharaonic Egypt, on battlefields, in cities, and in iconographic art-works of ancient Europe. Precisely because Blacks were not an uncommon sight, and because the ancients did not attach a value-judgement to Black skin, there was no innate hostility expressed. Differences in physical characteristics did exist, but were not synonymous with superiority or inferiority. In fact, Homer's reference to Blacks in *The Iliad* is indicative of the Greek attitude at the time:

For Zeus went to the blameless Aithiopians at the Ocean
Yesterday to feast, and the rest of the gods went with him. (Lattimore, 70)

Generally, such an attitude persisted till the late classical and early Christian periods. The centrality of the Homeric poems to the beginning of Western literature was such that, due in large part to the neutral/favourable image of Blacks it proffered, there was no corresponding theorisation of race along Black-white oppositional lines. In Homer, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Herodotus, Diodorus, Blacks were common and their piety was in fact legendary (Snowden, *Before*, 10). The Greeks not only acknowledged their cultural indebtedness to Egypt, but also testified to the civilising spiritual effect of the "Ethiopians" on Egypt itself (Drake, 1991, 167).

However, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle began to make a distinction between "civilised" Ethiopians and the headless, barbaric monsters that the "uncivilised" other Ethiopians (in sub-Sahara Africa) were. As a result, a structure was introduced into Greek discourse whereby the self-Other distinction emerged as culture, instead of race, and became the basis for differentiation. According to St. Clair Drake "This [new image] remained the essential basic element in Mediterranean appraisals of sub-Sahara Africans well into the fourteenth century A.D" (1990, 38). Closely associated with this

shift in image was the Greek philosophic and pseudo-scientific new thought that sought to explain skin-colour differences resulting from climatic regional differences.

When the Romans later conquered Egypt, they played a crucial role in the evolution of what the image of Blacks was in antiquity to what it became in the Judeo-Christian era. For, out of the synthesis the Romans made between Greek representations of Blacks and their own not-so-benign image of them, emerged a new image that would make it considerably easier for early Christendom to represent the Black as sensuous and sinful. The aesthetic and philosophic impact of this stereotyping on how the West would later theorise Black subjective agency has been devastating. This development is worth noting, for the Enlightenment's neo-classical recovery of Greek aesthetics and ethics will be the foundation on which a formidable theory will be epistemologically legitimised based, not on Greek mytho-historical discourse or Roman pseudo-science, but on the "infallible" authority of "rational" science: biology.

Because this early Christian idea of Blacks as pagans and sinners was reinforced by pejorative representations of Blacks in the Mesopotamian tradition of Judaism, the universalist, 'raceless' discourse of Christianity found the retention of a racist philosophy too convenient to jettison. This was because the equation of Blackness with sin was all the excuse Christianity needed to justify an aggressive crusade to wash the "Ethiopians" and, later, sub-Sahara Africa, of "sin" (Drake, 1990 28-31).

The process of rendering the Black subjectivity completely voiceless and invisible began with European modernity. For, having carefully edited its neo-classical heritage to pare it of positive images of Blacks in antiquity, modernity began to sound like an epistemological attempt to ground white supremacy. In European modernity, the Enlightenment was definitely the Black subjective agency's darkest moment; so dark that it would take this subjectivity about a hundred years to even begin to recover. For, more systematically than ever, the Black subject was not conceived as a discoursing agency,

but made into an object discoursed on, merely constructed, and stigmatised. It became transfixed, immobilised, and mute. In the discourse of modernity, Descartes and the German Enlightenment philosophers are of particular importance in any understanding of the genealogy of the issues to which modern critical race theory devotes so much intellectual energy. The scientific norms of the epistemological shift initiated by Descartes and the aims of Kant's physical geography and pragmatic anthropology were geared toward unpacking the subject "Man". The goal was to provide an exhaustive mapping through observation and classification. Basically, rational science set out to draw a line between humans and non-humans; between beauty and ugliness. In this new mode of knowledge-gathering, physical appearance became crucial. And so, in Kant skin-colour became equated with immutable racial essence and degree of intellect. (110-111) On that basis, Kant proceeded to rank mankind in the following order:

- white
- yellow
- black
- red

Thus racial differentiation went from being cultural to being biological.

J. D. Fague states that, "Although Hegel's direct influence on the elaboration of African history may have been small, the view he represented became part of the historical orthodoxy of the nineteenth century, and not without its adherents even today" (3). Recent "positive" minority appropriations of Hegel notwithstanding, the call in Black critical theory to renounce him is based on credible epistemological and moral grounds. Paulin Hountondji's observation that: "Hegel's philosophy of history...when all is said and done, is nothing but a celebration of the European spirit [at the expense of Europe's Others]" (11) is an acknowledgement of inherent racism in Hegel's normative gaze. The argument that there is a racist subtext to such an apparently apolitical text as

Phenomenology of Spirit is based on how the Hegelian dialectic of self-realisation and its appropriations of the non-Westerner as knowledge, property, economic opportunity, lay down the structures to be replicated by slavery and colonisation. It is the same necessity to appropriate and organise into a hierarchy at the core of the self-Other dialectic that led to Europe's arrogation of the right to enunciate History (with a capital h). Thus, Edouard Glissant argues:

...History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone made the history of the World....Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian peoples to the prehistorical, in order to preserve History for European peoples exclusively. (64)

Here, Glissant is operating within a counterdiscursive tradition that seeks to debunk a number of Eurocentric biases, the same tradition that causes a liberal European like Jan Nederveen Pieterse to concede that "the Occident ...is only a nineteenth-century fabrication." (134) Such revisionist interrogations of Time, History, and the idea of Europe, are still considered heresy in certain circles of Western academia. This is so, even as, according to Glissant, it is now increasingly clear that:

Only technical [sic] hegemony (that is, the acquired capacity to subjugate nature and consequently to intoxicate any possible culture with the knowledge created from this subjugation and which is suited to it) still permits the west, which has known the anxieties resulting from a challenged legitimacy, to continue to exercise its sovereignty which is no longer by right but by circumstance. (78)

Hegel's view on Africa can be shown to be obsolete, and even dangerous. Thus Umberto Eco notes:

The nineteenth century deified the idea of progress as infinite and irreversible improvement. Indeed, the Hegelian idea of cumulative progress is perhaps the great error of modern civilization. Our age has realized that progress is not necessarily continuous and cumulative. Progress can know phases....The nineteenth century marks both the moment at which this version of progress was widely celebrated and the beginning of a deep moral crisis. It brought forth a sort of fundamentalism about progress from which we must escape. (186-187)

Hegel's philosophy of African history and religion is based on a number of falsehoods, all of which are racist. The image of Africa in his discourse is the result of a number of onto-epistemological fiats. From his basic premise that Africa is nothing but a

gigantic, mindless amorphousness at the undeveloped stage of consciousness, flow these corollary claims:

- Africa equals rampant barbarism
- because Africa has no written historical tradition, the oral ontology that regulates its history is so completely different from the *Geist* regulating History that Africa has not been touched by any lofty spirit
- therefore, Africa is outside History

This Africa cannot possibly be the birthplace of History. Though Hegel could have availed himself of alternative sources on Africa, he chose not to, mainly because in the Enlightenment recovery of classical ideas within which he was inscribing his discourse, the Africa-Darkness equation was already firmly entrenched in the Eurocentric prejudices of his time.

Christian M. Neugebauer's remark that "with Kant we are indirectly listening (via Schopenhauer, O. Spengler and Heidegger) to the coming racial mania of Nazibarbarism [sic]" is true (266). For, the senseless violence inflicted on those who were not Aryan/ white enough, was preceded by entrenched racism 'passing' as respectable historical and philosophical scholarship. Hegel's "African spirit" is the mind product of an intellectual who never set foot in Africa. It is important to point out the extent of Hegel's wrongheadedness and double standard. As revisionist theorists know, Europe itself is the sum of different cultural forms and trends. Christianity completed the apparent homogeneity of Europe by becoming the cultural umbrella for Europe's own already diverse peoples. As I hope to demonstrate below when I discuss Christianity, Western philosophy, literary theory, and the sets of archetypes and concepts which subtend all three, many of the elements in the constitution of Europe, turn out to be non-white. They are Egyptian after being Negroid African. It was the meeting and fusion of these diverse elements around the Mediterranean that produced the heritage that the

West has so conveniently whitewashed. It was crucial to Hegel's argument that Negroid Africa's opening onto other cultures be denied, in order that the epistemological conditions be created for the grounding of his "African spirit" theory.

Equally pertinent are Neugebauer's points on African ethnophilosophy and modern philosophy. According to him, ethnophilosophy in this context dignifies Hegel's falsehoods, for because it implicitly believes Hegel's *Geist* vs "African spirit" faulty dichotomy, it allows itself to be locked into Hegel's patently false premise. Secondly, ethnophilosophy is inadequate as a theoretical tool in refuting Hegel. Next, Neugebauer points out that Hegel's towering image as the Western philosopher *par excellence* is so intimidating that even some of Africa's most liberal modern philosophers have been taken in: "for example, P. J. Hountondji's scholastic manoeuvre to split Marx from Hegel, or the deep misunderstanding of the dialectical approach, as K. Wiredu demonstrates in his book (1980, p.180-181) and last but not least E. A. Ruch's abuse and misuses of Hegel's concept..." [sic] (261). What Neugebauer seems to be arguing here is that Hountondji's inability to countenance a racist dimension to Marxism may not be a failure of individual intelligence, but a consequence of the canonisation of dangerously biased thinkers. On Marxism and its genealogy, it is instructive to note Fredric Jameson's observation, intended as a positive one, in *Marxism and Form*, that "Marxism includes Hegel" (XV).

The DBSC enables one to have a new perspective on philosophy and race. Traditional Western philosophy's resistance to critical race theory, History's to the shifting of Africa to the center of intellectual inquiry, Literature's to the comparative redefinition of literary theory, can be explained in terms of the still largely closed mind of the West. This mind (as indicated by Doody, Hare, Gates, and, as we will see, Stephen R. Haynes, and others) has a particular sense of history and human destiny from which it does not intend to deviate. It is this kind of closure that makes it possible to produce at

the end of the twentieth-century such an epistemological aberration as *The Bell Curve*. This reinscription of biodeterminism could be intended to preempt any willingness on the part of the West to compensate Africa for past wrongs.

From late antiquity and early Christianity, through the Enlightenment, to *The Bell Curve*, Western representations of Africa and Blackness have been constructed by fantasy, supported by a biblical system of symbols, reinforced by the philosophical authority of Europe's greatest thinkers, and certified by the "empiricism" of science. This caricatured version of Africa as subjectivity is a racialised grotesquerie substituted for the real Black subjectivity that continues to outstrip and exceed such reductive essentialisations. Without lapsing into a gratuitous nativism, the DBSC uncovers traces of this other subjectivity by evoking the other history and philosophy of Africa. The next chapter will focus on the extent to which it has succeeded.

II. The Dakar--Brazzaville--Stanford Conversation (DBSC)

The revisionist elicitation of a more authentically Black-African onto-epistemological subjective agency or sense of reality is best grasped through a prior look at a whole genealogy of antecedents and layers of identity. The Hellenisation, Romanisation, Islamicisation, and Europeanisation of Africa have all cumulatively conferred but a nominal status on the continent as discoursing agency. It is in successfully debunking this cumulative agency as invention that the DBSC, as rigorous intellectual intervention, registers its philosophic importance in Black critical theory; or in world philosophy *tout court*. The DBSC returns present-day world critical theory to its African origin, and brings it back in a process of *remise en perspective* that rereads the significance of traditional Black Africa and ancient Egypt in the history of spiritual and metaphysical thought.

From roughly the Renaissance and Descartes, to Postmodernism and Deconstruction, Western critical theory can fairly be described as having argued itself into a quandary. The ethically sophistic character of the figuration of truth associated with these schools or moments in philosophy, one that affirms the absolute superiority of the observing mind, proffered what, according to Catherine Pickstock, has ended up "separat[ing] language *from itself*" (46). In seeking to refute the grounding of knowledge associated with the first set of schools, deconstruction only articulated a new form of radicalisation. I am not interested in these evolutions of Western theory *per se*, but only in the significance of this catalogue of reductiveness for Africa and Blackness in

philosophy and history. For, in each set of schools there is no serious attempt to engage Africa and Blackness. Both are either completely outside the referential range of Western philosophy, or the object of a perverse rhetoric of Otherness that displaces them through the deployment of a series of inherited constructivist and racialised images; or through the problematisation of the notions of essence and historical continuum. The genealogy of philosophical reflection within which a truer Africa can be theorised will have to be formulated very much independently of the intellectual inadequacy and ontological moorings of the current Western 'conceptual grid'. The last two sections of my thesis flesh out this argument, with particular reference to the need for new directions in literary theory.

The thoroughgoing revisionist philosophy of history proffered by the DBSC has the combined effect of enabling a philosophic recovery of a pre-modern idea of language and of pluralising, as a result, the understanding and representation of Africa and Blackness. In both instances, the issue is the ontological status of the claims that have been made by others about what Africa really is. Predictably, this epistemological move has been misinterpreted by conservative scholarship as nativist and misguided pseudo-scholarship. And so, it may help to quickly reformulate the intent of the DBSC. It is not a case of a destabilised and ineffectual Africa afflicted by various disasters, seeking an unearned glory in a distant and ancient Egypt. It is rather a question of suppressed historical and philosophical truths gradually surging, achieving momentum, consistency, and legitimacy, finally gathering into a counterdiscourse informed and significant enough to effect a radical rethinking of history and a number of philosophical assumptions. The DBSC is rather unlike other minority discourses that have forced a rethinking of historiography, because it rides on the added edge of an African origin of Man and of philosophic speculation. Critical theory's ability to formulate a more authentic idea of Africa is closely linked with the question of memory, of time and space. It is linked with

the question of an uninterrupted history that cuts across the crusts of forcibly inscribed layers of conferred identity.

A Brief Africanist History of Time

Jean-Claude Carrière formulated this problematics recently in a series of reflections where, not surprisingly, Africa is concretely present as a temporal referent. To this extent, Africa can be said to help calibrate Carrière's reflections on temporality. In a long interview significantly entitled "Answering the Sphinx", Carrière recalls asking Oliver Sacks: "What constitutes a normal human being...I mean from the point of view of a neurologist [sic]." (113) To this, Sacks replies:

For us, a normal human being is someone who can tell his own story....That is to say,....someone who knows where he's come from, who has a past, who is situated within time. He remembers his life and everything he has learnt. He has a present too, not just in the sense that he lives at a particular time, but in that he has an identity. The moment he speaks to you, he is capable of telling you correctly his name, address, profession, etc. (113)

Therefore, according to Carrière, "A normal human being is ...someone capable of telling his own story and, therefore, of situating himself in time" (113, emphasis added).

I find Carrière pertinent to an Africanist cause, for his is the view of a Westerner seriously questioning the way the West has gone about making sense of history for too long. In addition to the epistemological limitations in self-apprehension Carrière points out, he raises a number of substantive epistemological issues which have a lot in common with the premise upon which the DBSC calls for a new understanding of philosophy, as a prelude to the emergence of a new Black subjective agency.

Frantz Fanon has, of course, virtually exhausted the discussion of the psychiatric aspects and consequences of colonialism (amnesia, personality disorder, etc.); in short, with his detailed attention to the psychological toll of colonialism, Fanon wrote with insight on neurological issues having to do with what, in his own field, Sacks calls "the

mental disturbances caused by certain lesions of the brain" (113). Fanon has elucidated the complexity and effects of the psychodynamics of colonial victimisation through a deployment of clinical psychology. This approach and his application of the tools of psychoanalysis have enabled him to engage various insidious forms of colonial psychopathology. Yet, even Fanon's explanations, in spite of their view that Western psychology (e. g., Freudian) does not adequately explain phenomena associated with the colonial/racial condition, mainly focus on the twentieth-century, and at times border on Marxist analysis, a discursive thrust made necessary by the socio-political grounding of his psychological probes. And so, we are attentive to what Carrière says next:

Our brain is equipped to cope with a certain historical unfolding, a certain 'time span'. Is that why perhaps some people still reject the principle of the evolution of the species? We live for between fifty and a hundred years. At best we can hope to know our great grandparents and our great grandchildren. So from our own individual perspective we can contemplate up to 200 years of life either side of us, of visible, palpable life. ...Our study of history allows us to broaden this perspective, to go back in time some 2,000, 10,000 years. By a great effort of imagination we can go back as far as...32,000 years; that's not bad at all....And so now we are beginning to wonder about the extraordinary thickness of the ancient base upon which our lives are founded. If then we pass...to Lucy, it is quite clear that we run the risk of getting completely lost. How shall we conceive of the time in which that young woman lived, our distant cousin, discovered in Africa by Coppens and Johanson, who is 3.5 million years old? How are we to understand the evolution of a species that stretches from *Australopithecus Afarensis*, discovered in Ethiopia, to modern man?(And the history of man is so short compared with certain other species)....How are we to conceive of or apprehend a time span like that, given the organic limitations on our 'brain time'? (119)

The African subject's ability to situate itself in time, again, requires an epistemological shift made possible only by a new philosophy of history. However, history is only an indispensable temporal context within which to ground a metaphysical new agency. It is this increased and more rigorous engagement of the history of philosophy and of historiography that distinguishes the DBSC from such previous cultural and political antecedents or precursors as Césaire's and Senghor's Négritude, DuBois's, Padmore's and N'Krumah's Pan-Africanism (a coalition of Africans and peoples of African descent around the world)

The DBSC as Philosophic Discourse

In *Antériorité des civilisations nègres*, Diop makes a pertinent comment that points out a significant difference between African and Western philosophies of epistemological enquiry:

It is the difference in intellectual attitude between African and European researchers that is often the cause of...misunderstandings about the interpretation of facts and their relative importance. The scientific curiosity of the European researcher toward African data is essentially analytical. Viewing things from the exterior, often not desiring to develop a synthesis, the European researcher essentially attaches himself to explosive micro-analysis that is more or less tendentious as regards the facts and indefinitely puts off the stage of synthesis. The African researcher mistrusts this 'scientific' activity whose goal seems to be to dissolve African collective, historical consciousness in the pettiness of details. (26)

The dissolution of Africa as subjective agency in a mode of discourse which thrives on deferment is, unfortunately, what virtually all postmodernisms (including deconstruction) have in common. And so, apart from how it has enabled minorities to challenge totalising structures of power (and postmodernism was not the first discourse to enable this protest) postmodernism is a mode of enquiry Black critical discourse is wary of. The objection to dissemination and effective obliteration is really a riposte against the real erasure of Africa from the genealogy of spirituality and philosophy as articulated by Western critical theory. Such a theory does not make it easy to formulate Africa as a concrete geographic, historical, and philosophical entity; it makes it easier to undermine and discredit such efforts.

Paul Osker Kristeller notes in *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* that:

Plato's influence on Western thought has been so broad and profound, and in spite of occasional voices of dissent, so continuous, that a great contemporary thinker has been able to state that the history of Western philosophy may be characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato. (50)

What Kristeller goes on to say about the Renaissance is a typical conservative Western reading that does not acknowledge the full genealogy of Renaissance thought. The introduction of Plato at this point is helpful because, as a discussion of the history of

philosophy, it helps us see the possibility of reinstating Africa as or in philosophy. On the Plato-Christianity axis, Kristeller makes this comment:

The most important representative of Platonism in ancient Latin literature was St. Augustine, who acknowledged his debt to Plato and Plotinus more frankly than most of his modern theological admirers. Typical Platonist doctrines, such as the eternal presence of the universal forms in the mind of God, the immediate comprehension of these ideas by human reason, and the incorporeal nature and the immortality of the human soul, are persistently asserted in his earlier philosophical as well as in his later theological writings, and they do not become less Platonist because they are combined with different Biblical or specifically augustinian conceptions or because Augustine rejected other Platonic or Neoplatonic doctrines that seemed incompatible with Christian dogma. Augustine's repeated assertion that Platonism is closer to Christian doctrine than any other pagan philosophy went a long way to justify later attempts to combine or reconcile them with each other. (55)

In Augustine the Christian, we see, perhaps more concretely, a problematics he inherited from his Greek and Roman mentors; namely, the backgrounding or elision of the Egyptian antecedent (spiritual, philosophical, scientific) to Plato and Greece. This move to unhinge spiritual and metaphysical thought from its pagan prototypical, wholistic precepts will dog Christian and secular, Western, onto-epistemological practice for good.

For according to Paul Ricoeur:

The major failure of Augustinian theory is that it is unsuccessful in substituting a psychological conception of time for a cosmological [Egyptian] one, despite the undeniable progress this psychology represents in relation to any cosmological time. The aporia lies precisely in the fact that while this psychology can legitimately be added to the cosmology, it is unable to replace cosmology, as well as in the further fact that neither concept, considered separately, proposes a satisfying solution to their unresolvable disagreement. (*Time*, Vol. 3, 17)

It is really crucial for our argument to insist on the fact that St. Augustine was emulating Greek scholars who had only a partial understanding of what the Egyptians had said. To Ricoeur,

Augustine did not refute Aristotle's basic theory of the primacy of movement over time, although he did contribute a lasting solution to the problem Aristotle left in abeyance concerning the relation between the soul and time. Behind Aristotle stands an entire cosmological tradition, according to which time surrounds us, envelops us, and dominates us, without the soul having the power to produce it. I am convinced that the dialectic of *intentio* and *distentio animi* is powerless to produce this imperious character of time and that, paradoxically, it helps to conceal it....In order to make apparent the time of the world, which the Augustinian analysis fails to recognize, let us listen to Aristotle, and also hear,

behind him, the echoes of more ancient words, words whose meaning the Stagarite himself did not master. (12-14 passim, emphases added)

There is a fullness to reality that the Greco-Roman, the Judeo-Christian, and the culturally alienated ultramodernist African and Black denies or overlooks because of a lack of a continuous perspective on history. In Black critical theory, one of the effects of such a limited perspective is the claim that postmodernity is a condition that must be fully embraced instead of deploying what is seen as another ineffective, nativist, Black epistemological counterdiscourse. Yet, Paul Ricoeur argues that Greek philosophy comes from afar:

In order to restore its fullness to *physis*, we must be attentive to what Aristotle retains from Plato, despite the advance his philosophy of time represents in relation to that of his teacher. Moreover, we must lend an ear to the invincible word that, coming to us from far beyond Plato, before all our philosophy, and despite all our efforts to construct a phenomenology of time-consciousness teaches that we do not produce time but that it surrounds us, envelops us, and overpowers us with its awesome strength. (17)

What Ricoeur sees beyond the West, Aristotle, and Plato, is an ontology which predates the West by a staggering number of millennia. This ontology is best approached through a correlative reading strategy or method of apprehension which integrates cosmos, time, and language. In his discussion of language, Derrida offers an indication of how to read Plato diachronically, but does so in a very offhanded manner, displaying, in essence, the kind of intellectual attitude Diop deplores in his comparison of Western and African methods of enquiry. In *Dissemination*, he writes, and I quote him at length:

Our intention here has only been to sow the idea that the spontaneity, freedom, and fantasy attributed to Plato in his legend of Theuth were actually supervised and limited by rigorous necessities. The organization of the myth conforms to powerful constraints [which] coordinate as a system certain rules that make their presence known, sometimes in what is empirically partitioned off for us as "Greek language" or "culture," and sometimes, from without, in "foreign mythology." From which Plato has not only borrowed, nor borrowed a simple element: the identity of a character, Thoth, the god of writing. One cannot, in fact, speak—and we don't really know what the word would mean here anyway—of a borrowing. That is, of an addition contingent and external to the text. Plato had to make his tale conform to structural laws. The most general of these, those that govern and articulate the oppositions speech/writing, life/death, father/son, master/servant, first/second, legitimate son/orphan-bastard, soul/body, inside/outside, good/evil, seriousness/play, day/night, sun/moon, etc., also govern, and according to the

same configurations, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian mythology. And others, too, no doubt, which we have neither the intention nor the means to situate here. In concerning ourselves with the fact that Plato has not merely borrowed a simple element, we are thus bracketing off the problem of factual genealogy and of the empirical, effective communication among cultures and mythologies.] What we wish to do here is simply to point to the internal, structural necessity which alone has made possible such communication and any eventual contagion of mythemes. (85, emphases added)¹

In a footnote on the same page, Derrida refers his reader to a number of studies, including Serge Sauneron's *Les prêtres de l'ancienne Égypte*. Indeed, Plato more than just briefly and temporarily borrowed from Egyptian mythology. And Serge Sauneron stresses that present-day traditional Africa, where traces of pre-modern Black Africa can still be found, is where to look today to truly imagine the minds of ancient Egyptians. Contrary to what one sees in the merely archeological remains of Islamicised, present-day Egypt, in this traditional Africa, this ancient cosmological worldview is still lived, and not merely theorised. As Sauneron correctly states, one will have to look beyond the hybridised Egypt of today:

lorsque le Nil, par ses sept embouchures, se déverse [dans la Méditerranée], il laisse derrière lui toute la civilisation égyptienne dans ce qu'elle a de plus original... [la Méditerranée] marque ..la limite d'un monde – d'un monde *africain* ; aussi les révélations d'Ogotommeli, ou la philosophie bantoue apportent-elles de précieux éléments qui nous aident à mieux comprendre certains aspects de la pensée religieuse égyptienne. (11)

To substantiate its point on this real cultural link between Black Africa and Egypt, Sauneron's book shows the picture of a lanky Black Egyptian male (p. 12). The inscription under it reads: "Niankhpépi-le-noir, prêtre lecteur et chef des prophètes; VIe dynastie. (Musée du Caire)" (emphasis added). There are indeed traces and echoes of traditional Africa in ancient Egypt, in spite of heavy Islamisation.

The argument that the main trope of *Phaedrus* – i. e. Thoth -- is of Egyptian origin is essential as a way of clarifying for a modern history of philosophy the spiritual origin of philosophy, i. e., that the Greek Logos is the simplification and denaturalisation of the more complex Egyptian divine and creative Word. With Aristotle began a post-Platonist

tradition which inaugurated a metaphysical shift that will permeate discourse from Descartes, through structuralism, to neo-pragmatism. Thus the discourse of dissemination extolled by Derrida has its origins in the eleventh-century discourse of *mathesis* which, by prioritising writing as the ultimate medium of knowledge, in effect abolished time and eternity. This onto-epistemology was intensified and carried to an extreme through the operationalisation and oversimplification of the complexity of reality into a set of positivisms which cannot suitably accommodate the kind of Black agency at issue here. Far from being the desired type of liberating objective knowledge, this shift became just another dominant discourse which succumbed to the temptation of overconfidence many such discourses are prone to. Therefore, to speak of a conscious Western conspiracy may not be an overstatement. One of the arguments one often hears in Black activist discourse (say, in Afrocentricity) is that Western intellectual history would not be so testy each time Black counterdiscourse claims a more significant African role in civilisation, if the accusation of a Western cover-up were completely unfounded. The elaborate measures the West has deployed to secure a monopoly on historiography is indeed suspicious. When Tom Hare points out the acrimonious reaction of a hysterical Western academic right wing (Lefkowitz et al), he is confirming what Black commentators have said for decades. Indeed, as we will see in his long interview with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Soyinka too speaks of suppression of evidence.

From the point of view of the DBSC, what characterises the above epistemological evolution which the West has authorised and dominated, is an inducement of forgetfulness that in effect indirectly coerces Black subjectivity into consenting to its own manipulation. As my discussion, below, of E. San Juan, Jr.'s developing-world ("Third World") resistance-theory shows, late capitalism only accelerated the process.

In response to the West's elision of an African agency from the history of philosophy, the DBSC proffers a macro conception of ontology, of Time, and of the history of the Word. The scale on which it conceives history is beyond the purview of conventional historical discourse. This approach is what Diop calls "histoire sans interruption."² Such a continuum for the twenty-first century is a challenge to much of academic dogma, to the extent that it changes the approach to history in a fundamental way. It shifts our perspective on what issues we raise, how we frame them, and which particular concepts we deploy. It clarifies for us and liberates us from the operations of reductive historiography, by showing how monumental history is a mnemonic for framing intellectual enquiry. This is what we should understand Diop to mean in *Postcolonial Black Africa*, when he points out that:

Up to the present day the history of Black Africa has been written with dates as dry as a grocer's invoice without hardly ever looking to find the key that opens the door to the intelligence, to the comprehension of African society. (XI)

To the DBSC, revisiting the earliest manifestations and contexts of the Word is helpful too, for it enables a world that is no longer used to thinking on such a scale to clearly see how reductive concepts and inadequate terminology directly and gradually resulted from the West's Hellenisation of language and its legitimisation of this form of Hellenism into universalism.³ This approach serves as an instructive corrective against the kind of reductive and constructivist historical [and scientific] discourse(s) Ricoeur calls:

artificially set by historians against the background of general history, which is the history of first-order entities (actual communities, nations, civilizations, etc.), which are defined by their historical persistence, hence by the continuity of their existence. These special histories are those of art, science, and so forth. They gather together works that are by nature discontinuous, which are only connected with one another by some thematic unity that is not given by life in society but rather is authoritatively defined by historians, who decide, following their own conceptions, what is to taken as art, science, etc. (*Time*, Vol. 3, 217-218, emphases added)

The publication of *Nations nègres et Culture* established Diop as an intellectual bent on submitting age-old assumptions to an iconoclastic re-examination. His thesis

about the original Blackness of Egypt raised eyebrows, genuine and feigned. Yet his critics were unable to effectively discredit him. This was mainly because these critics were often not really familiar with the range of issues he was raising and the vast expanse of time he was covering. As a result, they could not demonstrate in any definitive way that he was wrong. Those detractors who did realise that he was or might be right were irked nonetheless, for to them Diop was a nuisance who was determined to take another look at the "already settled" History Debate (if we may adapt Juliet Gardiner's title here). Black Africa's history has been truncated, he argues; it is crucial to reconnect this Africa with Egypt by retelling the history of human evolution. Only by articulating this revisionist *epistēmē* would Black Africa be enabled an intellectual renaissance. In *Antériorité des civilisations nègres: Mythes ou vérité hystorique*, Diop warned that history as science would not live up to the intellectual integrity that ought to motivate it until breaks and distortions in historiography have been addressed. The book was a riposte to the critics who were engaged in a campaign to discredit him. It drew on recent advances in science to substantiate his objection to academic dogma. (*Antériorité* also prefigured the counter-Islamic identity demands of the Algerian Berbers). In *Parenté génétique de l'égyptien pharaonique et des langues négro-africaines*, Diop engages the theme of genealogy (of peoples, and of the history of ideas) more explicitly. He draws on linguistics to cogently establish the link between Black African languages and ancient Egyptian, thus giving scientific solidity to the thesis of a common space for the two cultures. This book was the first ever to offer such a demonstration based on linguistics. *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire* has the merit of tackling the issue of gender in antiquity. Its comparative approach was not a reckless and simplistic exercise designed to set one part of Africa against the other. The contrastive approach was a methodological decision made necessary by the thematics of incremental evolution and complementarity in how culture progressed, in order to

specify Africa's contribution. The accomplishment of *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* can be gauged by the reaction it triggered: it is similar to what is happening to Bernal today in conservative circles. French academics were really resentful that Diop was breaking their monopoly on what the official version of Africa's history should be. It all makes sense if we try to read Bernal back into Diop. For according to Bernal in *Black Athena*:

Naturally, the instrumental rise of Orientalism must – at least in England and France – be associated with the huge expansion of colonialism and other forms of domination over Asia and Africa taking place at the same time. Not only was a systematic understanding of non-European peoples and their spoken language needed to control these people but a knowledge of their civilisations, by seizing and categorising their cultures, ensured that the natives themselves could learn about their own civilisations only through European scholarship. This provided yet another rope to the colonial elites to the metropolitan countries, which has been an increasingly important factor in the retention of European cultural hegemony since the decline of direct colonisation in the second half of the twentieth century. (236)

Two points should be made here very quickly. Diop wrote about Egypt long before Bernal did. Secondly, in spite of his sympathy for the thesis of an African contribution to Greek culture, Bernal could be construed as reading racism as it applied to Jews and Blacks. My thesis is more centered on Africa. Neither is my thesis based on what is now negatively referred to as Afrocentrism/Afrocentricity, as one can tell from the theorists I discuss in Chapter 3 and the reasons I give for my choices.⁴

On the question of spirituality, we note that the idea of a dead god that rises, saves mankind, and ascends to heaven, is not an originally Judeo-Christian idea; and the concept of an autogenous God is not original to the three Abrahamic faiths either. The first formulation of this theogony was in the story of Ra, Osiris's father, the father on whose right-hand he sits in heaven.⁵ Africa, including Black Africa, contributed these archetypes (in the mysteries of Osiris, Ogun, etc.) to the history of ideas. The spiritual, philosophical, cultural, scientific and technological outbursts of thought and creativity which occurred in ancient Egypt were the peak of a process which had begun deep inside Black Africa with the emergence of the first humans. Out of their gradually

evolving reflection and spirituality emerged Art, ethico-philosophical speculation, and science. As they spread over the continent, the exceptionally fertile soil and climate of the Nile valley created stable socio-economic conditions for deepening spiritual and speculative thought which, over several millennia, reached a zenith in the production of archetypes. The earliest and greatest spiritual centres were located not around the Mediterranean shores (Lower Egypt), but in that part of Egypt (Upper Egypt) that was in Black Africa. This is where spiritual wisdom was at its most intense. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, *The Book of the Dead* says: "This is the flesh itself of Osiris." (Diop, *Civilization*, 312) Five hundred years before Christ, Dionysus (the name given to Osiris after he was incorporated into the Greek and northern Mediterranean pantheon) enjoins his followers: "Drink, this is my blood; eat, this is my flesh." (Diop, *Civilization*, 312) Also, the notion of the holy trinity predates Christianity; "I was one; I became three" (Diop, *Civilization*, 312), refers to the Osiris-Isis-Horus (or Ra) triad. In his study of Yoruba hermeneutics and theosophy, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. locates a similar pre-Christian triadic notion.⁶ And then, we find in the story of the birth of the god Apis, a story which is the prototype of immaculate conception (Diop, *Civilization*, 312). There are more instances of Christian borrowing.⁷ Again, Egyptian philosophy itself did not emerge *ex nihilo*. It must instead be understood as the culmination of an evolutionary process in philosophic speculation that went hand in hand with the evolution and migration of the first humans from southern to northern Africa. This trajectory also applies to the course of civilisation. As I will show with reference to Senghor, this South-North African continuum was severed when desertification pushed a section of the population North, and the other section South. Revisionist and reconstructionist critical theory seeks to reconnect this cultural and philosophical entity in order to authorise a new subjective agency as *sujet parlant* or philosophic self.

The claim that Egypt is the cradle of philosophy is based on the observation that it was this people who produced the first theorists in human history, in that it formulated the earliest myths, cosmogonies, and theogonies. It was the first culture to theorise the origin of the universe, and the origin and genealogy of the gods. Out of myth, cosmogony, and theogony will emerge philosophy, and according to Diop, [this archetypal] "Egyptian 'cosmogony'....is attested to by the texts of the pyramids (2600 B.C.) [and dates from].... the epoch when even the Greeks did not exist in history yet, and when the Chinese and the Hindu philosophers were [inconsequential]" (Diop, *Civilization*, 310). Rice's and Kolpaktchy's books concur with Diop's on most of these issues. Again, Diop points out how important it is to historicise pharaonic philosophy itself in terms of the theory of human evolution I posited above:

...according to the quasi-unanimous testimony of the ancients, Nubian civilization preceded and might even have given birth to that of Egypt. This is quite logical if one considers the likelihood that the Nile Valley was peopled by a progressive descent of the Black peoples from the region of the Great Lakes, the cradle of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. But conclusive archeological facts to demonstrate this hypothesis were missing. The gap, it seems, has been filled, thanks to the excavations by Keith Seele, of the University of Chicago, conducted at the Qostul cemetery in Nubia, under the auspices of UNESCO's international campaign of 1963-64, before the construction of the Aswan dam, and the flooding of the region by the filling of the reservoir. (103)

Michael A. Hoffman realises how crucial the pre-pharaonic era is. And so, in his *Egypt Before the Pharaohs: The Prehistoric Foundations of Egyptian Civilization*, he sets out to emphasise:

the importance of the interpersonal, historical, and sociological circumstances surrounding...the period-by-period presentation of Egyptian prehistory in terms of a series of ongoing cultural processes stretching from the first entry of our human ancestors into the Valley of the Nile perhaps one million years ago, to the spectacular emergence of Egyptian civilization under the pharaohs of the first two dynasties, between 3100 and 2700 B.C. (10)

In *Egypt's Making: The Origins of Ancient Egypt 5000--2000 BC*, Michael Rice makes this diachronic, modern elicitation of Egypt much more comprehensive by squarely tackling the race factor on which the DBSC insists. In Rice's estimation:

The culture which grew and flourished in the Nile Valley was wholly autochthonous. It grew out of the lives and preoccupations of the cattle-rearing African peoples (black Africans, it must certainly be acknowledged) who were the true ancestors of the Pharaohs, in all their majesty and power. The Egyptians long held on to the recognition of their essentially African character....Egypt's decline began when these essentially African characteristics became diluted by incursions from outside the Valley. (221)

Rice has no good news for those engaged in such twists and turns as the Atlantis (hypo)thesis, or in the other thesis that extraterrestrials, or some mystic figure, emerged from nowhere and taught the Egyptians everything they ever accomplished. In his view, it is their denial of time, their truncated Western sense of history, that is deluding them into thinking that before Europe and the West, nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished by other cultures:

The Egyptian society did *not* spring fully ordered and organized instantly into being. The point must still be made, for both the appearance and the reality are so extraordinary: in a matter of a few short centuries the Egyptian Kingdom was devised and formulated, to endure in all its essential characteristics for three thousand years, the longest lasting of all advanced human societies. Egypt's social sophistication was profound at a time when all the world, except for Sumer, was locked in a benighted barbarism which had been unchanged for thousands of years, since, indeed, Paleolithic times; if Egyptian society did not in fact emerge fully developed, a casual observer might be forgiven for thinking that it did, so far removed was it from any sort of human experience up to that time....But Egypt's emergence as a true nation state (she is the very first example in history of that dubious political entity) is well charted. (24)

A credible case can, therefore, be made that Western philosophy is, in essence, not a footnote, but an appendage, to Egyptian and Black African philosophy. It is possible to make such a provocative claim, given the larger sense of Time and History, and the ultimately wholistic outlook of philosophic reflection I am defending in this dissertation. The imbrication of liturgical time and historical time is an approach strictly materialist readings of history resent. Yet, millenia ago the mystics of ancient Egypt came to the intuitive but infallible realisation that the history of time is a structure of knowledge which secular, modern historiography cannot exhaust. This is why modern history, philosophy, and even science, often looks back and stares at the inadequacy of its own paradigm.

At the very least, then, maybe one should also endorse non-empirical modes, if only as mnemonic devices we fall back on, instead of dismissing them outrightly.

Archetypes of Egyptian Thought ('Deep Time', Liturgical Time, Historical Time)

With the above sketch of the history of Egyptian philosophy, I now propose to examine the nature, logic, and dynamics of this system of thought in order to try to represent a new idea of an African agency as Time, Being, and language. In order to go beyond appearances and understand the hidden essence of things, the Egyptians formulated roughly four main systems of philosophical enquiry: the *Hermopolitan* system, the *Heliopolitan* system, the *Memphite* system, and the *Theban* system, (Diop, *Civilization*, 310). These four provided a speculative, explanatory framework whose very distinct characteristics was that it coupled the principle of rational explanation with mystical/divine anthropomorphism. To Diop, the basis of this explanatory approach was the primordial matter the Egyptians referred to as *Nun*, understood as "primordial waters". The *Nun* was a primitive, chaotic, archetypal non-being (not nothingness!) out of which emerged Ra, God (or Plato's demiurge). This was possible, because the *Nun*:

Contained the law of transformation, the principle of the evolution of matter through time, equally considered as a divinity: *Khepera*. It is the law of becoming that, acting on matter through time, will actualize the archetypes, the essences, the beings who are therefore already created in potentiality, before being created in actuality. (Diop, *Civilization*, 310)

Ra, the self-created god, takes the process of creation a step further by willing the world into existence through the power of the Word. Ra is the first self-created god in world cosmogony and the earliest one in world theogony. This principle of Egyptian spirituality and philosophy will also inspire such Greek and Latin Atomists as Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius, according to Diop (328). The *Nun* is prototypical in

that *Ka*, the Word by which Ra conjured beings into existence, will later be The Word of the three Abrahamic faiths, and “the objective idea” of Hegelianism (311). A set of principles regulates the dynamics of the *Nun* and nature. The philosophical importance of the *Nun* is that it is the origin of dialectical thought:

Kuk and Kuket = the primordial darkness and its opposite: darkness and light.

Nun and Nunet = the primordial waters and their opposite: matter and Nothingness.

Heh and Hehet = spatial infinity and its opposite: the infinite and the Finite, the unlimited and the limited.

Amon and Amonet = the hidden and the visible, the noumenon and the Phenomenon.

Niaou and Niaouet = emptiness and its opposite: the void and the replete, matter. (Diop, *Civilization*, 313)

Additionally, each human being is the sum of four principles:

1. the Zed or Ket, which decomposes after death.
2. The Ba, which is the body's corporeal soul (the double of the body throughout Black Africa)
3. the being's shadow
4. the Ka + immortal principle that rejoins the divinity in heaven after death. (312)

From Descartes to Derrida: Reductive Deductions

The philosophic tradition which runs from Descartes, through Kant, to even Derrida has produced but a series of reductive deductions that simplifies the complex nature of reality. A postcolonial take on Derridian philosophy would be to say that it accelerated the process of decentering Western philosophy as metanarrative. Yet, as we will see in chapters IV and V a closer look shows that Derrida cannot forego his Eurocentric privileges; or that he is an intellectual powerless against capitalist economy's paradoxical erosion of intellectual authority and humanist values. An Africanist, phenomenological reading would be that Derrida brings to his modern philosophy of writing only a partial understanding of Egyptian philosophy of the spoken and written Word. Even where minority interests are concerned, deconstruction is not the first effort in the history of thought to have sought to cast doubt on our certainties. For example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. believes Black Americans preceded Derrida in the practice of deconstruction. By this, Gates means that Blacks have been deconstructing Euro-American dominant discourses since slavery.⁸ Such an assertion can be construed as a way of reining in deconstructionists who seem to suggest that deconstructionist insight is the most sophisticated paradigm for understanding all reality. It is deconstruction's conception of writing as nothing but unmitigated Fall and its nihilist suspension of all referentiality that seems to linger, that seems to be the dominant impression, in the minds of sceptical readers. This nihilism is what Catherine Pickstock points out in Derrida (103). Pickstock engages Derrida from a perspective that looks similar to the African: the theological perspective. Yet, her intervention is not radical enough, since she is still operating within a set of Judeo-Christian genealogical assumptions. The archetypal concepts she deploys as an antidote to what she perceives as deconstructionist and postmodernist shadow-boxing are actually pagan, mystical, Egyptian and, ultimately, Black African. Christianity is not the originator of these archetypes or concepts. And Derrida himself is still too unconsciously imbricated with

the Judeo-Christian and Western tradition he seeks to interrogate and transform. In spite of its subversive potential, deconstruction now leaves the suspicious reader the rather disconcerting impression of being merely a freeplaying dissemination of reality. As I will show in my discussion of recent African-American perspectives on deconstruction in Chapter V, Derrida is much that the DBSC is not. Mark C. Taylor's genealogical validation or restricted contextualisation of Derrida only confirms this observation.

The crisis in Black critical theory is due in large part to the tendency of many critics to mistake what is in vogue for original and ethically sound thought. The ability to instantiate genuinely original thought in the Black tradition involves the ability to relativise Western philosophy in the overall history of speculative thought. Efforts, like Rodolphe Gasché's in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (1986), to reinstate deconstruction on the grounds that it is not in the same tradition of excessively depoliticised discourses as postmodernism will have to do a little more to convince sceptical practitioners of minority discourses.⁹ Deconstruction has permeated all domains of intellectual activity and acquired the formidable force of a particularly seductive dominant discourse, as can be seen in the fact that virtually all schools of critical thought seem to feel some need to situate themselves in relation to deconstruction. It is as though the ability to locate themselves vis-à-vis what is in vogue will legitimise whatever kind of identity they are postulating. And when some of these schools do not see the necessity of such a strategy, critics are quick to say that this is a lack of sophistication, an inability to see the benefits of the essentially aporetic philosophy deconstruction proffers as the thing. As we will see in my discussion of James Snead, to take just one example that is specifically pertinent to my ethnic position, the discrepancy between what iconoclastic theory professes and how it often leaves power-relations unchanged, reinforces the awareness of minority groups of the

very real consequences of philosophic theory. Even Richard Rorty's ingenious attempt to debunk philosophy is suspect to some who see it as a subtle attempt to exonerate Western high theory after it has done a good job of relegating various groups to the margins. This is, very much, John McDowell's position in "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," a contribution to Robert B. Brandom's collection on Rorty.¹⁰ Raising this issue enables me to sharpen my take on Derrida.

At the end of *Civilisation or Barbarism*, Cheikh Anta Diop offers, among other things, a physicist's reading of the crisis in epistemology. Diop's inclusion of physics in his overall discussion of this crisis provides his argument with formidable cogency. He engages head-on the question of the epistemological status of language (i.e. writing as against speech). To him, scientific discourse as writing or spatialised figuration lacks some of the referential resources needed to articulate new phenomena. In Diop's opinion, "The incapacity of language to embrace exactly the contours of the real is often the cause of errors in philosophical, scientific, or even mathematical reasoning" (Diop, *Civilization*, 365). It is important to note that Diop is here referring to classical and modern discourses. To him, therefore, "classical philosophy, as promoted by men of letters, is dead" (375), and with it, classical physics becomes obsolete since:

classical physics is founded on three principles that quantum physics has proven wrong: determinism, objectivity, and completeness. The principle of determinism postulates that all the phenomena of nature obey rigorous laws, in such a way that by knowing the initial conditions of a system, namely its position and its momentum, one can rigorously determine its future evolution.(368)

The verdict is unequivocal: Western classical philosophy is deeply flawed. To Diop, all this is the predictable outcome of an onto-epistemological contact, followed by a separation, between Egypt and Greece which began around the time the Greek materialist school of thought demythologised reality and reified determinism into an absolutism. This development in Western thought was intensified during the Renaissance when the decline in religious faith resulted in the ascendancy of modern

materialist philosophy. Egyptian world-view/philosophy posits the concept of the *Nun* as what Obenga refers to in *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa* as a “cosmic beforehand” (38), a transformative becoming that is before all “subsequent becoming.” However, according to this world-view, situated somewhere between creationism and evolutionism, a second concept emerges: that of *Kheper*. In its varied derivatives, the concept denotes potentiality and metamorphosis. Together, both concepts constitute the expression of a philosophy of being *in actu* and *in potentia*. Obenga is therefore correct in observing:

With the concept *kheper*, “to exist”, “to become”, the Egyptians had some notion of the development of beings and things in the immense cosmic movement of the universe. This concept *kheper* is written with a hieroglyph which is a sacred scarab. This sacred Egyptian scarab is present elsewhere on the African continent, with the same symbolic value, in an identical context.(42)

Obenga emphasises the heuristic and transformative nature of this “Dialectics of the One and the Multiple”(42) by locating it within a diachronic racial and cross-continental spacio-temporality. He identifies it as “a cultural and psychological macrostructure easily identifiable between the Egypto-Nubian Valley of the Nile and the rest of the African continent” (43). Kolpaktchy identifies a closely related dynamic concept as not only uniquely Egyptian, but as a legacy Egypt gave the West, via Greece:

L'idée de la métamorphose fut une des plus profondes élaborées par la spiritualité égyptienne.... le pouvoir de la métamorphose et de transformisme général était, pour l'ancien Égyptien, la démonstration première de sa liberté, qui l'égalait aux dieux...le concept de la possibilité illimitée [est] un plan visionnaire des Égyptiens...la région de l'absolue *Possibilité* ; rien n'y est déterminé, délimité, fixe, stable; tout y subit la loi du mouvement; et ce qui s'y manifeste, apparaît sous un masque symbolique (comme, par exemple, les masques des divinités égyptiennes. (48-47 passim)

Several millennia later, Nobel-laureate (physics) Ilya Prigogine too speaks, in *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature*, of “macroscopic physics, chemistry, and biology” (6, emphasis added) in his discussion of the profoundly transformative impact of non-equilibrium thermodynamics. In his revisionist rereading of Western science and philosophy, Prigogine underscores the radical significance of the

discovery of what he calls the irreversibility of time. I am adapting Prigogine, because it seems to me that he fleshes out in scientific terms what is spiritually and philosophically expressed in ancient Egypt about the plausible future of the universe. This is what the concept of *Nun* is, as described by C. A. Diop and Obenga and, as we will see, also as thematised by Armah. Prigogine's work offers an additional angle of interrogation of Western philosophy. It is therefore important that I try to establish the pertinence of his arguments to the discussion at hand. According to him, classical science dealt with stable phenomena where the sense of certainty then enabled a prediction of the future. This was/is known as "the time-reversible laws of classical and quantum mechanics"(73). However, with the introduction of dissipative structures (associated with non-equilibrium thermodynamics, instability, probability- instead of certainty-, etc.), an 'arrow of time' emerged whereby "the future is no longer determined by the present, and the symmetry between past and future is broken" (6). This is what Prigogine calls the irreversibility of time. Prigogine drives home the ontological significance of his work by arguing that "Time and reality are irreducibly linked. Denying time may either be a consolation or a triumph of human reason. It is always a negation of reality"(187, emphases added). Prigogine explains at some length how Western science (and philosophy) were impoverished with the advent of materialist philosophy and its consolidation in Descartes. From the certainty of Cartesian onto-epistemological solipsism to the complete redundancy of the human knowing/observing subject, a radical shift has taken place at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a resurgence of an ancient construal of truth. Reality, we are now being warned, exists independently of the human observer. It has its own mind and coherence. Man is, thus, significantly relativised. Thus, tracing the epistemological legacy from Descartes, Kant, Newton, Prigogine too arrives at the observation that though the initial motivations of these thinkers might have been noble, their deductions have robbed reality of crucial

coordinates and “seemed to end in alienation--a negation of everything that gives meaning to human life”(186). Referring to Pythagoras (who studied in Egypt, but did not completely understand his instructors) and Descartes, Diop points out that this misunderstanding can be traced to the way these two figures confused matter and space. The accomplishment of Diop the physicist and historian in *Civilization or Barbarism* lies in his ability to substantiate his counterdiscursive claims with precepts in African philosophy and advances in modern science to which Africa has always contributed. He is thus perfectly consistent when he argues the profound ramifications of the introduction of chaos theory into the complacency of classical science. Classical philosophy and science became seriously flawed for having excluded uncertainty from their equations. The reality of a crisis in logical value was made even more concrete with the advent of quantum physics. What Diop calls “trivalent logic” (*Civilization*, 363) is a conceptual framework or reality that classical knowledge could not account for, due to the stable structure of its micro conceptual framework. The disruptive effect of the paranormal on logical discourse was such that if experiments in microphysics were conclusive, “by changing the referential, cause would become effect! Thus, it is the causality of physics in the classical sense that is at stake...”(370).

Precisely on how what used to be absurd became scientific, and therefore, philosophic reality, Prigogine's explains:

Over the past several decades, a new science has been born, the *physics of nonequilibrium processes*, and has led to concepts such as *self-organization* and *dissipative structures*The physics of nonequilibrium processes describes the effects of unidirectional time and gives fresh meaning to the term irreversibility. In the past, the arrow of time appeared in physics only through simple processes...This is no longer the case. We know that irreversibility leads to a host of novel phenomena, such as vortex formation, chemical oscillation, and laser light, all illustrating the essential *constructive* role of the arrow of time. [Illogicality and instability now]....lead to coherence, to effects that encompass billions and billions of particles. (3)

In light of this insight, Prigogine reevaluates thoroughly the soundness of the Western philosophic tradition:

The problems of time and determinism have remained at the core of Western thought since the pre-Socratics. How can we conceive of human creativity or ethics in a deterministic world?....This question reflects a profound contradiction in Western humanistic tradition, which emphasizes the importance of knowledge and objectivity, as well as individual responsibility and freedom of choice as implied by the ideal of democracy.(6)

Reality here seems to be three steps ahead of Western philosophy, for cosmic matter, or the universe, seems to have a logic, and an agenda of its own that make the human, the all-knowing Cartesian observer, rather redundant. Thus "This confronts us with the most difficult of all questions: What are the roots of time? Did time start with the "big bang"? Or does time preexist our universe?"(6)

At the dawn of this new rationality, "[t]hese questions place us at the very frontiers of space and time," (6) for "[t]ime is our most basic existential dimension....For philosophers, it remains the central question of ontology, at the very basis of the meaning of human existence" (13-14, emphasis added).

If time is what has obsessed Prigogine all his life, physics has for similar fundamental ontological reasons guided Diop's faith in science allied to an African philosophic cause; for, Diop reminds his reader of the definition of physics: "the scientific knowledge of the real" (363). This faith in science does not, however, mean the jettisoning of mysticism, as is the case with classical science. Mysticism works in tandem with science as a mnemonics and heuristics that spurs the open-minded, knowledge-seeking consciousness. Such an attitude to the search for knowledge is what was known in ancient Africa and Egypt as the coupling of discourse: a rewarding imbrication of science and prognostic mysticism. This is the kind of sensibility that offered Prigogine and others precious insight into the difference between reason and reality. And so, again and again, the question of the ontological status of writing as one particular way of knowing cannot be ignored. Thus, we come up against one of the most controversial statements Senghor has ever made. It is regarding writing and orality:

C'est la chance de l'Afrique noire d'avoir dédaigné l'écriture, même quand elle ne l'ignorait pas. Et de fait, on peut compter de nombreux alphabets inventés par des Nègres. C'est que l'écriture appauvrit le réel. Elle le cristallise en catégories rigides; elle le fixe quand le propre du réel est d'être *vivant*, fluide, et sans contours....C'est qu'en Afrique noire, dans une civilisation non pas 'en deçà' mais 'au-delà' de l'écriture, l'art majeur est celui de la *parole*. La parole y exprime la force vitale, l'être du nommant et, en même temps, l'être du nommé.¹¹

Sunday Anozie's interpretation of this claim in his essay is rather unfair to Senghor. Contrary to what Anozie suggests, Senghor is not claiming that African culture does not see the usefulness of writing, but only that there is in Africa (and in other ancient cultures) a more authentic mode of self-apprehension.

The problematics of the properties of language brings us briefly to Soyinka's essays in *MLAW*. First, to engage Soyinka, it is important to be open-minded and disposed to creatively understand Yoruba philosophy and the semantic properties of the language that articulates this worldview. Soyinka is not an impossibly difficult author as some have claimed. It is rather that foreigners have for so long oversimplified their understanding of Black Africa that a writer like Soyinka seems "out of place," "not Black enough." Such a reaction to Soyinka is still possible today, for there are those who still cannot believe that there is more to Black Africa than Tarzan and *Things Fall Apart* – i. e., the supposed simplicity of Achebe's novel. The philosophy of language Soyinka practices cannot always be translated in straightforward terms into spatialised Cartesian European modes of thought. For example, some of his plays, such as *A Dance of the Forests*, are almost unstageable, for staging them is considerably demanding. This is not because he cannot rewrite them (he can make quick work of that, i. e., can pander to simplistic tastes); but because he refuses to oversimplify his sense of reality. The densely aphoristic texture and structure of his discourse is made all the more challenging because he is first and foremost a playwright and poet. His language, poetic, fictional, and essayistic, etc. often reaches for compact and complex assertion, or

for summative formulation which engages mystic(al) reality. His style often "plunges straight into the 'chthonic real' ", and the deeper essence, of reality. The exuberance, resonance, and rhythm of his thought is suggestive of the metaphorical, associative, and ultimately optimistic predilection of the Yoruba mind. Not surprisingly, his first novel, *The Interpreters*, completely disoriented simple-minded historians of the African novel. Mark Kinkead-Weekes's "*The Interpreters* – A Form of Criticism," in James Gibbs's *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, is one good discussion of the effects of the novel. Soyinka's works can be seen as the artistic pole of the philosophy espoused by DBSC. It is due to his failure, or refusal, to see this function of Black poetics that Paget Henry intimates that Soyinka's and Wilson Harris's challenging writings are an indulgence in bad faith, a flight from historical and political reality. These are, of course, the Chinweizu type of accusations which, for good reasons, can be dismissed as overly simplistic; (Chinwezu's campaign to "colonise" African literature often, ironically, denies it its dynamic creativity). However, because these accusations resurface in a promising theorist like Henry, they are an unfortunate indication of Henry's inability to appreciate his fine fellow Caribbean's contribution – i. e., Wilson Harris's -- to ethnic self-apprehension. One of Soyinka's contributions to literary criticism is his brilliant use of anthropology to elucidate literature; and *MLAW*, especially the essay "The Fourth Stage", can be a difficult text to some because it is in many ways an astroprojection of consciousness, racial identitarian discourse self-reflecting and self-representating through a conscious, explicit, engagement of its cosmic location. In a way, this is the kind of philosophy of being Ricoeur practices, mainly due to the significance of the Egypt thematics in his theoretic reflections on the representation of being/consciousness in deep time. Before Soyinka, no-one had described the complexity of "l'Afrique des profondeurs" in such insightful terms. In order to profoundly understand the nature and dynamics of the type of reality Soyinka's essays engage, it is necessary to switch from a

purely materialist and linear apprehension of reality to the hyperreal. Understanding ritual and the mysteries of Ogun also leads the attentive reader to an appreciation of the mysteries and potentials of the universe. And so, it must be said for a start that much that Prigogine says about time, and much that Stephen Hawking, in *A Brief History of Time*, explains about a universe that “has no boundaries or edges in the imaginary time direction” (VIII) and “that is completely self-contained and without beginning or end,” (IX) is already expressly or potentially part of Yoruba (Dogon, etc.) mythology as articulated in Soyinka's essays. And, since my thesis is more interested in ancient Egypt, there is not a whole lot that Ricoeur, Hoffman, Rice, Bernal and other sympathetic Western theorists are saying that was not already expressed in Diop's prolific output. Soyinka is not some postmodernist or deconstructionist writing in a vacuum. He is registering an African differential, “a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores” (*MLAW*, XII) in relation to a Western philosophy; a differential which is rediscovering that which has never gone away; that which it repressed but which is resurfacing. Reality at the cosmological level is exceptionally rich, and it takes an original thinker and talented writer like Soyinka to imaginatively flesh it out in such cognitive terms. His language is a coupling of discourses, an imaginative imbrication of logical exposition and mysticism which eschews the inadequacy of the strictly materialistic conception of reality. The latter is, clearly, the object of Pickstock's stricture.

In Yoruba ritual, the cosmos is an “immovable and eternal immensity that surrounds [mankind]” (*MLAW*, 2) and makes him aware of “the bewildering phenomenon of the cosmic location of his being” (2). In this “undented vastness,” (2) mankind cannot aspire to the certainty of absolutism, for its most diligent deductions can only be reductive. Though this infinite vastness keeps wreaking havoc on presumptions to stability, “[I]ntuitions, sudden psychic emanations could, logically, only come from such an incomparable immensity” (2). Unlike the more readily apprehended triadic world of

the dead, the living, and the unborn, what Soyinka calls "the fourth stage" is a hyperreality of interconnectedness of realms or stages of human life and reality. It is the "the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality. It houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will" (26). My dissertation contends that this is where truly original thought, the kind that comes along and overturns our certainties, comes from. As even Hawking's comments, above, suggest, the nature of this fourth dimension of reality cannot be readily apprehended in the logical terms in which even most highly educated persons (intellectuals, academics, etc.) operate. Rather, it is a domain glimpsed by geniuses and psychics. Even Soyinka can only try to describe it. It is the site from which truly original newness enters the world. The genius, the psychic-- or the "actor-surrogate" in Yoruba ritual drama -- glimpses this awe-inspiring immensity. All three types of subjectivity operate at this hyperreal level; which is how they glimpse what Soyinka variously refers to as "essence-ideal"(1), "pure essence" (7), "archetypes" (19), "the ultimate expression of cosmic will" (26). When Soyinka uses such phrases or expressions as "seething cauldron of the dark world-will and psyche" (30), "an inner world of transition, the vortex of archetypes and kiln of primal images"(36) to convey the properties of this hyper-reality, he is referring to ritual and scientific reality that late twentieth-century physics (Prigogine, Hawking, and others) confirms in its affirmation of the superiority of this dimension of the real. Within this infinite cosmic matrix, the constantly innovative traditional Yoruba culture (and modern thermodynamics) activates, instantiates, more comprehensive images of the Black subjective agency in an ongoing process of what Soyinka calls "conceptions of becoming"(8). In the ritual exploration of the fourth stage of reality, consciousness and language are stretched. The "actor-surrogate," emulating Ogun, experiences a "displacement of consciousness". Here then, the actor:

in the role of [Ogun] becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering sounds which he barely comprehends but which are reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf...Tragic feeling in Yoruba drama stems from sympathetic knowledge of the protagonist's foray into this psychic abyss of the re-creative energies.(30-31)

Again, Prigogine reminds his audience that:

Science began with the Promethean affirmation of the power of reason, but it seemed to end in alienation—a negation of everything that gives meaning to human life. (185-186)

The sum of the philosophical principles in the makeup of Ogun is interesting. He is "a combination of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean principles" (Soyinka, *MLAW*, 26). Due to the disruptive Dionysian element, reckless and unchecked absolutism is mitigated. In fact, Ogun is "the 'Lord of the Road' of Ifa: that is, he opens the way to the heart of Ifa's wisdom" (27). Heuristically speaking, Ogun is nonetheless a restless, knowledge-seeking, and exceptional figure in the Yoruba pantheon, for "no other deity in the pantheon correlates so absolutely, through his own history and nature, with the numinous temper of the fourth area of existence which we have labelled the abyss of transition" (26). To a Yoruba, Ogun is, as such, the prototype, precursor, or progenitor of the modern astrophysicist and molecular biologist, for myth records him as "the forerunner and ancestor of paleotechnic man" (150) who forayed into the blind energies of the cosmic universe, and channelled them into a creative energy that achieves its own autonomous consistency that is still beyond the purview of purely rational theorisation even today. According to Soyinka:

The epic celebrates the victory of the human spirit over forces inimical to self-extension. It concretises in the form of action the arduous birth of the individual or communal entity, creates a new being through utilising and stressing the language of self-glorification to which human nature is healthily prone. The dramatic or tragic rites of the gods are, however, engaged with the more profound, more elusive phenomenon of being and non-being. Man can shelve and even overwhelm metaphysical uncertainties by epic feats, and prolong such a state of social euphoria by their constant recital, but this exercise in itself proves a mere surrogate to the bewildering phenomenon of the cosmic location of his being (2).

In the contrast thus established between the epic and tragedy, Soyinka conveys a sense of two rather different uses of language. The remark highlights the inadequacy of the intellect alone in apprehending the fourth-stage. It thus explicitly raises the problematics of language. The paradox of 'obscure' language offering a truer awareness of a larger and more dynamic reality is a paradox only if we cling to an illusory eulogisation of the self-sufficiency of rational thought. Spatialised discourse in the Cartesian and neo-pragmatist traditions is not up to the task of stretching consciousness to embrace this primal reality of the type in question in Soyinka's essays.

A rethinking or switching of the codes of referentiality by Soyinka elicits a Black subjectivity, order of knowledge, structure of being, that exceeds and outwits the metaphysical Africanity or Blackness represented in European modernity. Diop the historian and physicist has shown not only that the West inherited a cultural legacy from Africa, but also how, through a sense of insecurity, the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman epistemological traditions constructed elaborate layers of insulation (erasures of traces of borrowing), to disguise their pagan, and ultimately Black African, origin. The Renaissance exacerbated this reductionism by truncating the totality of the history of human thought and delimiting the scope of intellectual enquiry, which it then proceeded to reify into the History of thought. Soyinka's literary and cultural discourse complements Diop's scientific approach. It does it by more systematically and cogently formulating from within the African world-view a corrective idea of African philosophy and a different status of the Black subjective agency, reinstated within a more authentic gnosis. "How do we make once more present the culture of antiquity in spite of the intervening distance without falling in the same traps as Hegel's hubristic claim to overcome historicism in the [reductive and racist] logic of the Absolute Spirit?", Ricoeur asks in his above-mentioned essay (337). I suggest that one answer is to read Soyinka's essays. The momentum and direction of Black critical theory in the twenty-first

century can derive a lot of inspiration from the radical rethinking of historical and metaphysical reality as we see in Diop and Soyinka. It is the necessary theoretical work one must undertake in order to formulate a new genealogy within which to instantiate a recovered Black agency. In the past, Black critical theory (especially African and Caribbean) gained momentum, faltered, and fizzled, because it kept locating and formulating itself mainly within a theological and philosophical tradition inherited from a colonial and biased formal education.

As I indicated in my introduction and in the first chapter, what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have in common is not only their denial of their true genealogy, but also the particularly virulent discourse they mobilised for the invention and institutionalisation of Blackness as tainted and sub-human. The momentum of revisionist discourse is putting quite a dent in the Judeo-Christian theorisation of the "blemished" racialised (and gendered) Other. Here is Sallie McFague putting a feminist and environmentalist spin on the interrogation of the politics of Judeo-Christian Othering. She is worth quoting at length:

The scandal of uniqueness is absolutized by Christianity into one of its central doctrines, which claims that God is embodied in one place and one place only: in the man Jesus of Nazareth. He and he alone is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1: 15). The source, power, and goal of the universe is known through and only through a first-century Mediterranean carpenter. The creator and redeemer of the fifteen-billion-year history of the universe with its hundred billion galaxies (and their billion stars and planets) is available only in a thirty-year span of one human being's life on planet earth. The claim, when put in the context of contemporary science, seems skewed, to say the least. When the world consisted of the Roman Empire (with "barbarians" at its frontiers), the limitation of divine presence to Jesus of Nazareth had some plausibility while still being ethnocentric; but for many hundreds of years well before contemporary cosmology, the claims of other religious traditions have seriously challenged it. In its traditional form the claim is not only offensive to the integrity and value of other religions, but incredible, indeed absurd, in light of postmodern cosmology. It is not remotely compatible with our current picture of the universe. (289)

Paul Ricoeur records in apocalyptic terms some of the consequences of Western reductivist constructivisms:

Intellectual honesty demands the confession that, for us, the loss of credibility the Hegelian philosophy of history has undergone has the significance of an event in thinking, concerning which we may say neither that we brought it about nor that it simply happened, and concerning which we do not know if it is indicative of a catastrophe that is still crippling us or a deliverance whose glory we dare not celebrate. (*Time*, Vol. 3, 201-202)

Ricoeur feels this event first in terms of his own wounded *amour propre*:

For what readers of Hegel, once they have been seduced by the power of Hegel's thought as I have, do not feel the abandoning of this philosophy as a wound, a wound that, unlike those that affect the absolute Spirit, will not be healed? For such readers, if they are not to give into the weaknesses of nostalgia, we must wish the courage of the work of mourning.(206)

He then generalises it as a collective disappointment:

In the twentieth century, we have seen Europe's claim to totalize the history of the world come undone. We have even seen the heritages it tried to integrate in terms of one guiding idea come undone. Eurocentrism died with the political suicide of Europe in the First World War, with the ideological rending produced by the October Revolution, and with the withdrawal of Europe from the world scene, along with the fact of decolonization and the unequal—and probably antagonistic—development that opposes the industrial nations to the rest of the world. It now seems to us as though Hegel, seizing a favorable moment, a *kairos*, which has been revealed for what it was to our perception and our experience, only totalized a few leading aspects of the spiritual history of Europe and its geographical and historical environment, ones that, since that time, have come undone. What has come undone is the very substance of what Hegel sought to make into a concept. Difference has turned against development, conceived of as a *Stufengang*. (204-205)

And then, as a profoundly humbling realisation for the theorist in him:

We now understand better the sense in which the exodus from Hegelianism may be called an event in thinking. This event does not affect history in the sense of historiography but rather historical consciousness's understanding of itself, its self-understanding. In this sense, it is inscribed in the hermeneutics of historical consciousness. This event is even in its way a hermeneutical phenomenon. To admit that the self-understanding of the historical consciousness can be so affected by events that, to repeat, we cannot say whether we produced them or they simply happened, is to admit the finitude of the philosophical act that makes up the self-understanding of the historical consciousness. This finitude in interpretation signifies that all thought about thought has presuppositions that it can never master, which in their turn become the situations beginning from which we think, without our being able to think them through in themselves. Consequently, in quitting Hegelianism, we have to dare to say that the thoughtful consideration of history attempted by Hegel was itself a hermeneutical phenomenon, even an interpretive one, submitted to the same finitude (206, emphases added).

Ricoeur's simultaneous efforts to somehow reinstate Hegel (202-203) are, therefore, frankly moot. And so, Ricoeur reluctantly tows away the derailed 'Hegelian train' in these terms that renounce coercive totalisation:

We no longer seek the basis upon which the history of the world may be thought of as a completed whole, even if this realization is taken as inchoative or only present as a seed. We are no longer even sure whether the idea of freedom is or should be the focal point of this realization, especially if we put the accent on the political realization of freedom: (205)

It is the status of being denied as a gendered subjective agency by Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria and as a non-Western Other which motivates what might be called Malika Hachid's feminist version of the DBSC project of selfhood, and makes it amenable to a philosophic interpretation. Centuries after St. Augustine, a present-day Algerian looks across time and sees something radically different from what her illustrious predecessor and fellow Algerian saw. Aurelius Augustinus, AKA St. Augustine, was not just an Algerian-born philosopher like, say, the Sephardic Jew, now French man, Derrida. He was an Algerian Christian (born of Algerian parents) during the Roman occupation of what is now Algeria. The rational, deductive, and occidental type of Christian theology he formulated was already at a remove from the original oriental Christian theology that was closer to ancient Egypt in its spiritual archetypes. His strain of Christianity was so influential on the evolution of Christianity in Europe and on ancient European thought that it later eased Europe's accommodation to scientific enquiry. When later in life he switched from classical rational thinking and Christianity to Neoplatonism, it can be asserted that he was responding to an engrained ancient African mysticism that predated Christianity and the Roman invasion, to an original Algerian (Berber) sensibility upon which other types of identity were later layered. That Augustine should have hardly written about this ancient African mysticism in his prolific output can be clearly attributed to his Latin education and the spiritual and philosophical legacy that went with it. I have said that Hachid's feminist and scientific intervention is ultimately a philosophic

quest for understanding, for a recovery of a particular notion of being in time and space. In fact, the DBSC, to which we are associating Hachid here, has formulated some solid philosophical concepts that run counter to the Christian and classical values Augustine stood for. In isolating the main characteristics of traditional African philosophy, Senghor, in *Ce Que Je Crois*, offers a two-axes refiguration of selfhood that can be brought to bear on the reading of history at a time when modern historiography operates only along a horizontal and linear axis:

L'Homme n'est pas un individu inséré, mais une personne intégrée dans son groupe: sa famille, son clan, son ethnie, son État. A la *personne*, concept latin, enrichi par le Christianisme, l'Africain oppose une notion, c'est-à-dire une connaissance intuitive, plus complexe: plus sociale qu'individuelle, plus culturelle que technique. Verticalement, l'homme est enracinée dans son lignage, jusqu'à l'Ancêtre primordial, jusqu'à Dieu. Horizontalement, il est lié à la société des hommes: à son groupe, à ses groupes....et, par-delà, au cosmos. (112, emphases added)

In present-day Algeria, this original African identity can be concretely quantified in the Berber struggle for recognition and independence from Islam. It is a very real and concrete factor, because it refuses to go away and continues to disrupt a modern Algeria where Islam is forcibly imposed on Kabili culture. Hachid is a valuable factor in the DBSC debate, for she offers a precious North African, non-Negroid confirmation of many of the DBSC theses. Neither the forcibly imposed Islam (nor really Western formal education) has met the identitarian demands of the marginalised and persecuted Algerian woman and feminist, and the excluded non-Moslem Berber. Hence Hachid's revisionist and scientific bid to interrogate the distant past for an idea of what society was before organised religion, colonialism, racial prejudice, and paternalism, caused Algeria to 'lose its mind' and descend into intolerance and anarchy today. Simply put, Hachid's point is that modern Algeria has for too long failed to do a thorough *effort de mémoire*. This is a pertinent point, for Algeria is a rather special country in the Maghreb. It has never really known peace: the Ottoman invasion, the liberation war with France,

the Berber question, the current rift between the mainly Western-educated political élite and the Islamic fundamentalists (and what all this has meant for women and the Berber), have all robbed Algeria of stability. As a radical and insidious phenomenon, colonialism compromises the unwary colonised from within by reprogramming his mind, his country's economy, and his general outlook on life in a way that is fraught with far-reaching conflicts and consequences. It rarely leads to a genuine independence for the colonised, since it is not intended to really make him or her self-sufficient. Algeria's current religious (therefore, also gender) problems are considerably compounded by the colonial factor. On all fronts – religion, gender-relations, a flawed economic orientation – , it is fair to say that women are the most affected victims; and this is the background to Hachid's archeological/anthropological intervention. In his astute studies of colonialism in Algeria and Black Africa, Fanon has robustly described for us the psychiatric toll: how colonialism distorts by colouring the very terms and images the colonised uses to construct his/her universe. In North Africa, Algeria is also the most resistant to Islamicisation. For, even today the Berber proclaim very loudly that they are an African, not an Arab, culture. This feeling is especially strong among the Kabyle who still value certain pre-Islamic African rituals.¹² Algerian, paleontologist, and feminist, Hachid produced a book which confirms the negroid origin of much of present-day North Africa several millennia before Egypt and before the Ottoman invasion. Born during the turbulent years of the Algerian liberation war against France, this determined woman intellectual sought, through science, to understand the phenomenon of domination, especially in gender and race relations.¹³ It led her on a tortuous quest for meaning. She wrote her book “à la poursuite des images du passé”(104), in order “d’apporter aux Algériens certaines vérités historiques....rendre la fierté à mon peuple, lui donner de l’assurance en lui faisant prendre conscience de la grandeur de ses origines” (104). On the racial issue, Hachid is categorical. For, paleontologic findings confirm that “aux

racines les plus profondes de son identité, [Algeria] compte aussi la négritude et la berberité”(102). According to Hachid in *Le Tassili des Ajjer*, a staggering five thousand years before the pyramids were built, Black Africans lived where Algeria and Egypt are today. Like many developing countries, present-day Algeria has in a very real sense indeed ‘lost its mind’ through historical amnesia. Against the totalising discourses of military rulers and fundamental Islamists, Hachid's proposition is that “Si le peuple algérien et maghrébin connaissait davantage son patrimoine, il aurait moins de problèmes d'identité. Or l'histoire profonde de nos pays, celle qui remonte à la préhistoire, reste méconnue du grand public” (1998, 104). On the status of women in Algeria today, she remarks, much like Nancy Hartsock: “ Si nous, les femmes, avons eu autrefois tant d'importance, et cela durant des millénaires, pour quelle raison, aujourd'hui, souffrons-nous autant pour qu'on nous concède une place au sein de notre propre société?”(108). Structurally then, Hachid is countering the merely horizontal conception of selfhood or agency, opting instead for the complex horizontal and vertical conception of being. In *Gender in African Prehistory*, Susan Kent too identifies the denial of time as the real reason why male-dominated discourse on gender is often resistant to the desirability of a very long-term (from prehistory to modernity) understanding of gender-history. Commenting on the dynamics and complexity of gender roles in ancient Africa “before the encroachment of Western [and Islamic] societ[ies]” (13), she makes the following crucial point:

gender in some societies has little or nothing to do with sexuality or even with the biological sexes. Sexuality permeates gender in Western and other cultures, but I question its universality as a function of gender. If culture specifies what categories and attributes define each gender, then prehistory and historic conceptions of gender must be seen within the perspective of a diverse array of cultures. Although not accepted by all archeologists, most cross-cultural research demonstrates the cultural variability of gender in opposition to universal gender roles...Perhaps unintentionally, some researchers perceive men and women, maleness and femaleness, as reflections of Western norms...Such a perspective stereotypes gender in accordance with the images of Western conceptions of male and female behavior. This is why some archeologists have criticized

attempts to examine gender prehistorically and particularly cross-culturally.(13, emphasis added)

Like Hachid, Kent is here clearly enacting a new formulation of the African subjective agency: the feminist one. And like Hachid, she looks across time and is categorical in her assessment: "women... in prehistory never operated in isolation from men" (10). As with the DBSC, this new perspective on Africa in Hachid and Kent is enabled by an entirely new philosophy of the self as a product of time. I have introduced Kent and her appropriately different perspective on history as a prelude to what I will later say about Armah who was the first Black novelist anywhere to tackle gender in prehistoric Africa as a way of addressing the negative effects of modern bias against women.

To a considerable extent, what Western philosophy says about the nature of reality depends on what it says about race. W. E. B. DuBois was right about race and the twentieth-century (how race was going to be the main issue), for it was the factor behind the rationale that some cultures are "naturally destined" to rule, while others can only be servants. What Western philosophers say about race imperceptibly regulates the integrity of their discourse by constituting an ethical factor which determines depth of insight, ethics of formulation, and the long-term viability of intellectual reflection. Western philosophy is a catalogue of reductive formulations which, spurred on by the illusory aspiration to rational certainty, culminated in modernism, and continues, as far as literature is concerned, in a postmodernist coterie of people who, as Edward Said suggests in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), mainly write for one another. It is an instance of what, in a similar context, Cornell West calls "the American evasion of philosophy" -- in a book that bears this title (1989). Said writes:

As it is practised in the American academy today, literary theory has for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work....Even if we accept (as in the main I do) the arguments put forward by Hayden White—that there is no way to get past texts in order to apprehend "real" history directly—it is still possible to say that such a claim need not also eliminate interest in the events and the circumstances entailed by and expressed in the

texts themselves....Literary theory, whether of the Left or of the Right, has turned its back on these things. This can be considered, I think, the triumph of the ethics of professionalism (4).

Said points out how "sophisticated" textualist philosophy is as tainted by (hard) politics as the "crude" minority schools of theory it derides. To him, one ideology of the aesthetics of High Theory lies in the fact that,

it is no accident that the emergence of so narrowly defined a philosophy of pure textuality and critical noninterference has coincided with the ascendancy of Reaganism....In having given up the world entirely for the aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text, contemporary criticism has retreated from its constituency, the citizens of modern society, who have been left to the hands of "free" market forces, multinational corporations, the manipulations of consumer appetites. (4)

Said's and West's concern are, clearly, that this orientation of discourse – for example, when some theorists claim that there no such a thing as race, or that it does not matter -- often becomes a excuse for evading socio-historical reflection of any concrete consequence. Such a turn in critical thought makes it possible to summarily dismiss such schools of thought as the DBSC. It is a paradox that, having helped itself to African archetypes (Diop, Rice, Freke, etc.), Western philosophy proceeded to completely write Africa out of history and philosophy; and the scheme nearly succeeded. However, an increasing number of theorists (African and non-African) is calling for a new problematics of reality; and this thesis contends that race is at least a subtext of this shift in epistemological perspective. Prigogine's repeated strictures on Western philosophy amount to more than a passing judgement on Western critical theory. To Black Africa, this need to rethink reality has meant radically reinstating itself within a larger and more comprehensive order of reality that was formulated on the African continent at the beginning of time and in antiquity, while remaining grounded in the twenty-first century. Revisionist African philosophy overcomes the denial of time, cosmos, history, and the subject, which postmodernism and New Pragmatism celebrate.

As promised above, I have tried to elicit an African subjective agency against a background of a crisis in Western reason and as an indication of the desire for an identitarian reassertion in Black critical theory. The crisis, noticed from a variety of cultural and intellectual sites, is confirmed by the sources my thesis cites or describes. They are from disciplines as diverse as Egyptology (Diop, Rice, etc.), ritual (Soyinka), philosophy (Pickstock), the history of Christianity (Pickstock, Freke, Diop), literary history (Doody), feminism (Hachid, Kent, McFague), and cosmology (Diop, Prigogine, Soyinka). Politically, what these revisionist theories collectively enunciate is a new epistemology or problematics of reality, an honest liberation of the Word that sincerely transcends racial barriers; a prioritisation of human freedom over power (brute and subtle), dogma, and obscurantism. Epistemologically, these interventions are a riposte to a modern denial of time and of space. The limitation on historical perspective was a very deliberate, politically motivated, delimitation of the field of onto-epistemology and cognitive enquiry whereby Westerncentrism (Kent's term) regulated the terms and extent of spiritual and intellectual enquiry. By the end of the twentieth-century, it had resulted in a Western intellectual tradition (in spite of dazzling technological advances) incapable of sincerely countenancing multidimensionality, the West's invented Others, and even Nature itself (McFague, Prigogine). The power thematics dominates or consistently subtends Timothy Freke's and Peter Gandy's intervention. According to both authors, with Christianity,

Pagan mysticism and scientific enquiry were replaced by dogmatic authoritarianism...What has this done to the Western psyche? We have been a culture cut off from its roots. Only after the rediscovery of Pagan philosophy in the fifteenth century, during the appropriately named Renaissance, or 'rebirth', was Western civilization able to climb out of the morass of superstition and strife into which it had descended, a process which in recent years yielded the fruit of modern science. Yet, unlike the ancients, we have not viewed science and spirituality as two aspects of the same Mystery, but as implacably hostile to each other. (*The Jesus*, 304-307)

Epistemologically speaking, Christianity's (and science's) invention and demonisation of the mystical Other would contemporaneously and subsequently be a blueprint in history for the invention and essentialisation of several Others, for as Freke and Gandy aver:

By adopting the Jewish father god Jehovah as the only acceptable face of God, [Christianity] has subjugated the Divine Feminine, a theological perspective it has used to legitimize the subordination of women....[Christianity's] self-proclaimed superiority has been used to justify the violent destruction of other societies around the world. (*The Jesus*, 307 passim)

I have emphasised what Diop, in *Civilization*, calls the paganist "coupling of discourse" (what Freke and Gandy refer to here as the necessary mysticism + science approach), in order to register a richer and ultimately superior paradigm for the theorisation of reality and of the nature of the language deployed to articulate it. For the extreme and institutionalised dichotomy this chapter critiques has also produced a relationality in the imaging or conception of language where excessive secularisation and deontologisation has led to subjectlessness [shadow-boxing] and the exaltation of the nihil in discourse. Catherine Pickstock clearly attributes this end-result to postmodernism and deconstruction. Such an a-contextual, free-floating, conception of language and the subject is a further and more sophisticated relativisation and dispersal of the Other (Pagan, Black, woman, etc.). The problematics of power has for millennia dogged and undone the West's repeated attempts to totalise. This is how we should read Edward Said's recent prognostic remark in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* that, "The Eurocentric vision of culture has been somewhat eroded; the claims of feminism, of Europe's Others, of subaltern cultures, of theoretical currents running counter to the rule of affirmatively dominant pragmatism and empiricism have been felt and will not be ignored" (169). In a register reminiscent of Soyinka and Prigogine, Said adds, "the discrepancies and dissonances of human experiences [now run counter to the West's] routinely compartmentalized stabilities"(169). This now concretely quantified corrective mode of thought signals the dawn of a new ethics in theory where balance

and human freedom sincerely conceived could be foregrounded over limitless power and academic dogma.

The works of many of Soyinka's (and Armah's) African contemporaries often do not evince the same in-depth figuration of reality and language. Generally speaking, this engagement is one of the contrasts one can establish between the discourse of Chinweizu's intervention to "decolonise," Ngugi's socialism, Biodun Jeyifo's class-consciousness, K. Anthony Appiah's strictly rationalist analytic philosophy and his anti-essentialism, Hountondji's Althusserianism, and Mudimbe's "invented" Africa. Another contrast is these other thinkers' reluctance to construe an Africa beyond the colonial and postcolonial era.

In the continuing search for Africa, consider now the following metaphysical pronouncements. I have chosen them cross-Atlantically to represent the Black world. In one of his countless uncompromising statements, Soyinka, the artist and mythmaker, in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*, asks simple-minded critics:

But what should [poetry] communicate? The dictionary value of every word? Phrase? Stanza? A story-line? Or could it be that the mind does not *always* demand a literal value out of every image? There are other fodder for the curious mind than the literalism of mundane phenomena. If there are not, then ritual for example is an affront to communication, for it is anything but literal. Magic, incantation, become an abomination because Western universitised sceptics repudiate the element of mystery in an increasingly empirical, consumer world-ordering. (101)

We recognise the same ability to locate reality at various levels within and outside fictional worlds in Toni Morrison's observation in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." It is an assertion which, when later fleshed out into individual works, would consecrate her in the literary canon and pantheon. I will quote her at length:

There is something very special and very identifiable about [Black literature] and it is my struggle to find that elusive but identifiable style in the books. My joy is when I think I have approached it; my misery is when I think I can't get there. (342)

In the paragraph immediately following the above quotation, Morrison is more specific about the metaphysical matrix that inspires such a perspective:

I could blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world. We are very practical people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted [mysticism], which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were "discredited knowledge"...only because Black people were discredited. (342, emphasis added).

The intermingling of the natural and the supernatural as seen in Morrison's and Soyinka's works is not, as critics of Chinweizu's persuasion often claim, a deceptive flight from social reality. Chinweizu, then, is an example of the "Western universitised" critic, an orientation that is similar to the Westerner's inability to readily relate to Black theories of hyper-reality -- what, in *MLAW*, Soyinka refers to as the Westerner's incapacity to penetrate the complex truths of the African *Weltanschauung*. The failure or refusal to conceive art as Morrison and Soyinka understand it can also produce poetics whose defects, because concealed by an apparently sophisticated style, are hard to detect. Such is the nature of Mallarmé's poems as viewed by Soyinka. In his introduction to *Poems of Black Africa*, Soyinka makes the following fine difference:

The interfusion of object, thought and spirit is not however peculiar to the African mind. But the quality which separates [poems in *Poems of Black Africa*] from the [European] Surrealists—to take one example—is their avoidance of the Mallarmean extreme, the occidental indulgence which gives an autogenetic existence to the expression of the symbolic-mythical world of the creative imagination, severed arbitrarily from other realities (14).

Mallarmé, in other words, endorsed Surrealism (an ultimately non-Western philosophy of art, as my thesis argues) and encoded it into his poetics. However, as is often the case with non-Western concepts the West borrowed, Mallarmé, according to Soyinka, overused Surrealism. It is an issue also addressed, but allayed, in Malcolm Bowie's *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult*. Consider, finally, the following observation, also

made from a Black metaphysical and ontological vantage by Charles Johnson in his *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970*:

[Ralph] Ellison gets the point wrong, or backward: it is not reality or the world that is formless and fluid but human perception—consciousness itself that allows us infinitely to perceive meaning as a phenomenon of change, transformation, and process; it is Mind (the subject pole of experience), not Matter (the object pole), that gives the perceived world a polymorphous character. (16)

Johnson's observation is all the more remarkable, because he makes it in a thoughtful work that is, much like Adell's, anti-essentialist in that it distances itself from a rather gratuitously exotic attempt to control the image of Blackness. However, as a matter of intellectual honesty, Johnson feels the need to recall even experimental Black American fiction to order, if you will, by pointing out the danger of nihilism that is very real when fiction is totally unhinged and cast adrift in the eulogisation of uncontrolled dissemination of subjectivity. In other words, Johnson, like Soyinka, in essence points out what can happen, or be philosophically/ontol implied by art, when innovative, experimental, literature goes too far. It is important to emphasise the Pan-African thrust of Johnson's book, for it is a perceptive meditation on African and Afro-American philosophies of art. Perhaps more importantly, Johnson's claim registers an important, nuanced, Black standpoint, compared to postmodernism and deconstruction. Johnson's is an important and subtle differentiation, for overenthusiastic Western critics who want to see Black literature quickly "come of age" might have expected Johnson's total endorsement of postmodernist and deconstructive theories of composition. Again, what is crucial here, philosophically speaking, is that, it is one thing to point out the inadequacy of human observation as expressed through language of the strictly logical and linear type. We cannot, however, on the basis of this and of the fact that written language is mostly what modern humankind has, decree that there is nothing outside language; that is, that there is nothing besides what language can articulate. To Pickstock, such absolutisms have "nihilistic implications for epistemology and ontology" (p. 3). Here is Soyinka, articulating

this issue in a way that helps us grasp it more lucidly. Soyinka, in other words, is making an ontological distinction between the mere periodisation of knowledge and the wholistic nature of (ultimate) reality:

I have evolved a rather elaborate metaphor to describe [the rhythm of Western metaphysics and philosophy of art]; appropriately, it is not only mechanistic but represents a period technology which marked yet another phase of Western man's comprehensive world-view....You must picture a train engine which shunts itself between rather closely-spaced suburban stations. At the first station it picks up a ballast of allegory, puffs into the next emitting a smokescreen on the eternal landscape of nature truths. At the next it loads up with a different species of logs which we shall call naturalist timber, puffs into a half-way stop where it fills up with the synthetic fuel of surrealism. From which point yet another holistic world-view is glimpsed and asserted through psychedelic smoke. A new consignment of absurdist coke lures it into the next station from which it departs giving off no smoke at all, and no fire, until it derails briefly along constructivist tracks and is towed back to the starting-point by a neo-classic engine....This, for us [Africans] is the occidental creative rhythm, a series of intellectual spasms which, especially today, appears susceptible even to commercial manipulation. (MLAW, 37-38)

From the African and Black philosophic perspective I am discussing in my thesis, there is another concrete ground on which the claims of postmodernism and deconstruction are not universal: the positivism that each is critiquing did not include Africa in its referential range to begin with; therefore, it never really suspected Africa as alternative, because it had ignored it. And so, to engage the genealogical aspect of world philosophy, the DBSC is justified in doing what Pickstock does too when she, in effect, steps outside the Western speculative (religious and philosophic) tradition which moulded her in order to try to sort out a very ancient issue on ontology in which a lot is at stake regarding the thrust of future intellectual endeavour.

III. Connections Outside Africa: The Black Americas

In the Black diaspora, the lack of phenomenological or mystical depth in artistic, philosophic, and literary discourses has, by and large, been more noticeable in the United States than in the Caribbean communities. In America, besides Jean Toomer and his fine but harrowing *tour de force* *Cane*, it was with Toni Morrison that the situation began to change on a sustained basis. The Afro-Caribbean and Antillean communities, especially the ones which are heavily or predominantly Black, have had a more vibrant tradition of Black African mysticism -- Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique are cases in point -- though Black America has had an older tradition of Ethiopianism and Egyptianism. In *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, Soyinka addresses again Pan-African identity. He comments on the absence of Black Africa in Black American poetics in the past:

A careful reading of DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was so seminal to black thinking, would reveal that DuBois was not fully conscious of the affective *presence* of African reality. Later, of course, he came to embrace the politics and the leadership of the emerging independent nations, moving physically to Ghana where he now rests. But his intellectual perception remained largely historical. He wrote of Egyptian glory, the pyramids and the sphinxes from which the black American glimpsed a vanished nobility, but in the African *past continuous*, especially the cultural, he seemed blissfully disinterested. Those virtues that were singled out for celebration in the poetry of Négritude—the black race as a people of intuition, rhythm, and ancestral strength, as leaven for the reconciliation in the dough of humanity—none of this was *real* or applicable to self and community for the majority of Negro American writers—Langston Hughes always exempted. The mystic evocation of Négritude poetry was, in short, missing from much of this American writing, Ralph Ellison notwithstanding. (132-133, 153, 171-173, *passim*)

In a country where Black Americans were a minority and where racism against Blacks was arguably the most unbearable in the world, Black American cultural discourse can

be said to have prioritised the kind of glory it must have thought a racist America might easily identify with, given the latter's biblical tradition. One reading of Soyinka's comment is to note the Black diaspora's inability or reluctance to conceptualise Africa (from Black Africa to ancient Egypt) as a continuous whole. The realisation of the need and ability to conceive and theorise African mysticism organically characterises some of the most diligent recent African-American intellectual efforts. In literature and other art-forms, the articulation or thematisation of this dimension of subjectivity takes the form of a probing of the psyche as it relates to very ancient 'texts' of origination, or of an engagement of the sublime; and the sublime is what surrealism is partly about, as I will show when I discuss the Black novel in Chapter 4.

As a result of the impact of the postmodernist and deconstructive turns in critical theory on Black identitarian discourses, a tendency (regarded by some as an indispensable mark of sophistication) emerged decades ago that has consisted in discrediting the relevance of African continuities in the Americas. It is, we know, a fallout from the problematisation of the concept of race. Yet, there is a school of Black thought on both sides of the Atlantic which still sees the viability of Pan-Africanism as a paradigm for rigorous intellectual reflection. This is the school that engages my attention, especially as it relates to the Black Africa-ancient Egypt thematics. Therefore, in this chapter I look at a few incisive Pan-Africanist formulations (Randall Robinson, Césaire, and others) of the depth of being and experience that can be gleaned from a reinsertion of the diasporic subjective agency into the full flow of time, that is, into racial memory. Such a reinsertion provides at least a psychological palliative against the overwhelming threat of obliteration and dispersal posed by an innately racist and very fast-paced, hyper-industrial, mainstream America(s). In discussing the dynamics of this new or recovered diasporic sense and structure of being, I will touch on the literary aspect by discussing surrealism as a leitmotif of ways of reconnecting with essence of being. The

revisionist discourse of the DBSC has gradually extended the bounds and range of Black identity theory by conferring historical depth and metaphysical plenitude on the Black subjective agency. Arguably, therefore, the benefits of the cumulative effect of gradual Pan-Africanist assertion have, in a sense, been more significant for the Black diaspora. The particular ethos of the specific version of Pan-Africanism that is the DBSC reinforce the viability of theorising the diasporic self along two intersecting axes: the horizontal (present) and the vertical (ancestral). Commenting on one of the founding tropes of African-American theories of human agency, John Henrik Clarke confesses in his foreword to Jacob H. Carruthers's *Mdw Ntr Divine Speech: A Historical Reflection of African Deep Thought from the Time of The Pharaohs to The Present*: "There are times, even now, when the Africans away from home long for a definition of African Deep Thought more than the Africans at home" (XI). The epistemological and ontological import of this extended paradigm is clear when one considers that what underpins virtually all the latest ontologies or registers of African-American subjective agency (spiritual, philosophic, historical, and even economic) is the concept of memory as it enables a sense of the self and of history writ large through the activation of a new temporality that connects to Africa. This is why Randall Robinson feels the need to provide a firm philosophic grounding for his essentially economic book-length intervention, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. In the opening chapter entitled "Reclaiming Our Ancient Self", he observes:

From the times of ancient scribes, history has been written and studied, traditions honored, gods worshiped, monuments to the greater glory erected, institutions sustained in countless cultures coursing humanity's mosaic of peoples across the millenia like life-giving rivers. These are not extraneous behaviors. They are essential to the health of any people's spirit. They are givers of collective self-worth, cheaters of mortality, binding frail short lives into a people's ongoing, epic cumulative achievement. (14-15, emphases added)

As a backdrop to what is ultimately an argument for economic reparation, Robinson accurately diagnoses how his people have been deliberately warped in spirit and perception:

But memory was an essential ingredient for social progress and Blacks had none. Only memory would tip them off that their poverty was not fixed in nature as a condition that was meant to be. Not what had always been. Not normal. The beauty of their cage was that its constraints were not visible to the eye....Blacks walked around with their cages inside them. Each spindly little bar of the cage denoted something they didn't know but needed to know about themselves. They'd been controlled easily enough being shown things they didn't *need* to know about other people--well, mostly white people. Most blacks had come to tolerate their restricted menu of information, if not like it. (175)

Robinson knows only too well that the Black Africa to which he has referred up to this point is itself part of a larger psycho-cultural and geographic entity in world history, and that this is the total topography that should inform a reformulation of African-American historical agency:

The "story of the ancient Egyptians" had been told in books and on the screen, but not before the Egyptians had been boiled from black to white and uncoupled from the rest of Africa. White folk had no shame about it....Shameless perhaps, but here we blacks are, in the hundreds of millions the world over, caged by post-slavers in stunted, half-told, unfavorable pictures of what we were and can be. Too many of us too broken, scarred, soul-weary to engage in the full truth and glories of ourselves in the Africa way back as well as in our American experience. (176-177)

This shame, which is the source of Doody's embarrassment above, has a long history. The materialist thrust of the European Renaissance discourse truncated epistemology of its metaphysical depth (a legacy of Egypt) that had been a salient feature of the Middle Ages. In so doing, the Renaissance in effect completed the process of the gradual erasure of traces pointing to a predominantly Black origin of metaphysical speculation. We can argue, therefore, that the Renaissance's obsession to distance itself from the Black Other by not openly acknowledging its debt to Egypt and Africa led to a deliberate campaign whereby a new but shorter temporality was deployed to account for the history of ideas. The effect of this shift was that it falsified and perverted the historicisation of the Black subjective agency. This agency became reductively defined in terms of

absence: how it was lacking in many respects, compared to the cultural and technological successes of the West. The racist discourse of white America, including the post-Reconstruction era of mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, had a similar agenda of reductiveness or outright effacement. It sought to define the African-American primarily through the prism of slavery. In other words, it reduced the total history of this subjective agency by privileging the dehistoricised, decontextualised, and constructed agency as the constitutive factor of its subjectivity. This has been a tenacious attempt to invent the Negro; but one that has, nevertheless, failed, in spite of appearances to the contrary. It has failed, because Blacks (and non-Black sympathisers) the world over now have access to discourse to say things they knew but can only now express in the appropriate, influential forums. In the chapter "Redeeming the Curse," toward the end of his recent revisionist work *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*, Stephen R. Haynes reminds his reader of the tenacity of this invented paradigm in biblical exegesis, and points out its sophisticated mobilisation for oppression and effective social control:

A variety of textual forces have conspired to nudge readers toward the conclusion that Noah speaks for God....Any successful strategy for redeeming Noah's curse must attend to its historical, literary, and psychological elements, must have a track record of fruitful application to religious texts, and must be concerned with the mythical origins of violence (for what is the curse if not a narrative justification for organized violence?). (206)

Just how sophisticated race theory can be in how it succeeds in winning over even a reluctant victim, and how maintaining it is crucial to white America's sense of identity, is Wahneema Lubiano's argument in her introductory piece to *The House That Race Built: Original Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and Others on Black Americans and Politics in America Today*:

The idea of race and the operation of racism are the best friends that the economic and political élite have in the United States. They are the means by which a state and a political economy largely inimical to most of the US citizenry achieve the consent of the governed. They act as a distorting prism that allows that citizenry to imagine itself functioning as a moral and just people while

ignoring the widespread devastation directed at black Americans particularly....Poverty has a black face—not in reality, but in the public imagination. Crime has a black face....And I use the word "public" without a race adjective because the operation of racism is so thoroughgoing that even those who are its objects are not exempt from thinking about the world through its prism. (VII)

The invention of blackness in Western Egyptology, in Biblical (and Koranic) discourse, and in Western historiography's erasure of Africa: these are all precursors of and prototypes for America's invention of the Negro, as Lubiano suggests in a slightly different context:

The United States is not just the domicile of a historically specific form of racial oppression. If race—and its strategic social and ideological deployment as racism—didn't exist, the United States' severe inequalities and betrayal of its formal commitments to social equality and social justice would be readily apparent to anyone existing on this ground. (VII)

The attempt to effect a breach in this inadequately represented account of agency by a dominant and remorseless discourse has been relentless. For, though white American racist theory may sustain itself by being the condition that forecloses the full humanity and historicity of Black subjectivity, alternative accounts have gradually enabled the Black theorist to mutate from a passive human agency who lacks access to discourse to one who positions herself/himself as privileged active agency who authors her/his own corrective narrativisation of Black subjectivity. Black Egyptology has not only pushed and extended the boundaries of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean critical theory, it has also avoided reasonably well a number of pitfalls in diasporic countertheory. For instance, the turbulent socio-political times that spawned the Harlem Renaissance (1917--1935) predisposed the movement, as a nascent discourse, to formulate an ontology of being that purported to be a figuration of ethnic essence. We note, in passing, that the movement actually ran from what is considered the official implementation of an élitist programme of racial assertiveness (roughly 1917) to shortly after the 1934 publication of its last novel, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. When, in its first phase, the Harlem Renaissance took up the challenge that until Blacks

proved they could write their humanity remained doubtful, it was responding to white America's conception of "reason" (with which writing was equated) as the ultimate index of humanity, an idea that had its sources in Enlightenment philosophy. As I have been suggesting in my discussion of African philosophy, writing is not always the most authentic mode of the self's consciousness of itself. Not all profound knowledge is ideally conveyed through writing. Raising this issue enables one to see why though noble in intention, the Harlem Renaissance, at least in its initial phase, did not achieve the depth which, according to Angela Davis (above) it aspired to. The Enlightenment's staging of reason as an absolutism was an epistemological flaw inherited from the Renaissance. By reifying writing and "respectability" into the badge of eligibility for freedom and humanity, the Harlem Renaissance unwittingly abetted an insidious arrogation of authority that equated literacy with freedom. In the history of white America's reification of writing, one remembers the extent to which the Boston white élite went when trying to establish the authenticity of Phillis Wheatley's poems in its reluctance to see her as worthy of being a human being...Until the Black slaves proved they could write, they were not (full) human beings. The white élite probably thought the slaves would never show such a capacity. As a result, the first poems of this young Senegalese girl, brought to America as a slave, were met with disbelief. Referring to white America's reification of writing and its use to deny the Black person's humanity as "the black tradition's confinement and delimitation by the commodity of writing....the most pervasive emblem of capitalist commodity functions" (51), Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *Loose Canons: Notes On the Culture Wars*, tells of how in 1772, Wheatley appeared before a court in Boston to explain how "an African could possibly have written poetry all by herself" (53). Gates very recently (2003) dedicated a book-length study to Wheatley's case. The decision and the title itself highlight Wheatley's poems and the ensuing ordeal as a landmark in Black letters. The second phase of the Harlem Renaissance

was characterised by what was essentially scepticism and a challenge of the boundaries of Enlightenment thought, though the new generation of artists did not formulate this reservation in such modernist terms. Rather, the group registered its distance by taking the Black intellectual élite to task for its bourgeois liberal values of respectability. Even the Black Arts Movement (1965--1975), which emerged as a corrective discourse, remained blinkered by, fixated on, the undeniable socio-political nature of the most urgent preoccupations of the average Afro-American. This new movement partly proffered African values too and, according to Appiah's and Gates's *Africana*, it lasted loosely from the 1965 founding by Amiri Baraka of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School till around the mid-1970s when its presence dwindled, though its gains in academia were still palpable (239). While the Black Arts Movement was right in its intention to connect with the ordinary person, it failed to notice that which was the most deeply repressed, but crucial, in both the urban and the rural Afro-American: his/her African spirituality.

The New Phase of Black Egyptology in African-American and Caribbean Cultural and Literary Theories

The complexity of Black subjectivity will (re)assert itself in the twentieth-century in a multiplicity of agencies observable in two ways. First as social agency, though still racial, in the re-emergence of the interest in the connection between Black Africa and ancient Egypt and how this might elucidate the Black diaspora's own apprehension of itself. Second, as gendered agency in the thematic shift in fiction from the communal subjectivity to the ethnic writer's other identities -- for example, femininity and spirituality -- that served as matrix for/of new images and metaphors. The combined effect of these

two shifts has been the empowerment of Black critical theory and its ability to bring about a more thoroughgoing interrogation of Euro-American philosophy. Thus, Jacob Carruthers's fine rereading of ancient Egypt and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* scour the archeology of knowledge, uncovering blindspots, silences, and erasures. The phenomenology of consciousness that these modes of discourse foreground more effectively interrogate and undermine any reductive structure of identity. There has been an abiding, though still rather vague, feeling not only in Morrison's explorations of the Black individual and collective psyche, but also in her essays, that some form of ultimate homecoming, an aspiration to plenitude, be accomplished in order for African-American cultural discourse to be adequately grounded. Morrison enacts this split but plausibly reunifiable perspective in her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." Sensing inadequacy in her 'linear' language (i. e., the official, truncated, template of modern, mainstream, discourse on African-American subjectivity) to explain the inexplicable and intractable, Morrison takes off in an excursus in a bid to recover and reinscribe Black historical agency in the topography and annals of American literature. Morrison's basic argument here is that one cannot really responsibly understand the code of silence regarding the physical treatment and discursive codification of Blackness without understanding ancient Egypt. She writes: "A few comments on a larger, older, but no less telling academic struggle – an extremely successful one – may be helpful here. It is telling because it sheds light on certain aspects of this current debate and may locate its sources" (20, emphasis added). She then proceeds to quote Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* to show how the West fabricated itself by highjacking History through the appropriation of Egypt. The invention of ancient Greece required a massive obliteration of everything that was non-white. The history of history and its devious motives have enabled the West to legitimise (with a complicit media, a conservative academia, and high technology) what Derrick Jensen recently

referred to in a book title as the culture of make-believe. In another work (*A Language Older Than Words*), deploying a notion which, in Black critical theory, one has come to associate with Morrison: "the unspeakable," Jensen, in a language reminiscent of Doody, locates the motives for suppression and their legitimisation:

In order to maintain our way of living, we must, in a broad sense, tell lies to each other, and especially ourselves....This silencing is central to the workings of our culture. The staunch refusal to hear the voices of those we exploit is crucial to our domination of them. Religion, science, philosophy, politics, education, psychology, medicine, literature, linguistics, and art have all been pressed into service as tools to rationalize the silencing and degradation of women, children, other races, other cultures, the natural world and its members, our emotions, our consciences, our experiences, and our cultural and personal histories (2-3).

Though Jensen's specific concern in this book is how Western culture has impoverished the referential capacity of language through an atrophy of consciousness, he takes time to point out the sordid mechanism of make-believe:

We don't stop these atrocities, because we don't talk about them. We don't talk about them, because we don't think about them. We don't think about them, because they are too horrific to comprehend....' The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.(4)

Morrison's 'interpolation' of Egyptology is not an isolated rhetorical move in the critical interventions of present-day major Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean writers. This point brings us briefly to African-American Ethiopianism and Egyptianism. In *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*, Eric J. Sundquist suggests that the biblical passage: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Psalms 68:31), taken as a prophecy, was an exhortation which inspired in the African-American clergy and the peasant masses hope in a better and glorious ultimate destiny for Black people in general (518). This prophetic and discursive tradition, called "Ethiopianism," did not only become a solid part of the "Negro Spirituals" and a theme in Black folklore, especially in southern United States; it also generated a literary nationalism. According to Wilson Jeremiah Moses in *The*

Golden Age of Black Nationalism: 1850-1925, it inspired Martin Delany's *Blake* (1859), a work Moses records as "the earliest known example of a black nationalist novel in the United States" (149). To Moses, Delany's historical significance is also due to the fact that, like Alexander Crummell who inspired W.E.B. DuBois, he believed in essential attributes and destiny of each race, an attitude mainly generated by the realisation that slavery was a profound aberration that God's name and words could not, and should not, possibly have anything to do with. In other words, slavery was, on moral grounds, a defilement of God's name. But since it happened anyway, there must be a 'higher' reason for this. It is a rather twisted argument, but to Moses, it means,

In summary, Ethiopianism may be defined as the effort of the English-speaking black or African person to view his past enslavement and present cultural dependency in terms of the broader history of civilisation. It serves to remind him that this present scientific technological civilisation dominated by Western Europe for a scant four hundred years, will go under certainly—like all empires of the past.... It expresses the belief that the tragic racial experience has profound historical value, and that it has endowed the African with moral superiority and made him a seer. (160-161)

Egyptianism will combine with Ethiopianism to consolidate the ultimately Pan-African essence of Black American nationalism. For, according to Moses (194), it was at the gatherings of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association that presentations and discussions probed the identity of the Egyptians and how they might be genealogically linked to brown-skinned Black Americans. Moses points out how Crummell's American Negro Academy (now a sort of umbrella for different Black discussion groups) went on to disseminate Pan-Africanism throughout America. He calls the literary tradition which thematised Ethiopia, "the Ethiopian tradition" and identifies W.E.B. DuBois as "[its] central figure" (169). He then, rather indirectly, suggests that DuBois had come to the realisation that the English language as it was used in those days in the Black community was inadequate in representing Black consciousness. This understanding

caused the social scientist DuBois to turn to "the power of the imagination....dedicated to embodying his view of history in mythical form" (169).

With the publication of Sutton Grigg's novels -- beginning with *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) about the potential for a Black secession in Texas -- "the Black nationalist writing of the Golden Age reached a high level" (171). This sort of coming-of-age was not only owing to the uplifting ideology which Grigg's works had in common with the writings of the other members of the Black middle-class. In the context of my dissertation, he is, in a sense, a precursor of Randall Robinson, for he saw how the queer institution of slavery had fatally limited the Black person's full self-knowledge and the discursive means to articulate and translate it into socio-political dividends. Here is Grigg (as quoted by Moses):

Not a single race that has no literature is classified as great in the eyes of the world. Here then is the situation: They who would foster the patriotic spirit so needful for the advancement of mankind must find a way of embalming the memories of those who thus serve their fellows, and the races that have no literature are devoid of a method of embalming. (171)

The difference between Grigg's and Robinson's Pan-Africanism is that, not only does Robinson shift the focus from the (hastily conceived) literary to the spiritual, philosophical, and historiographic (albeit as a backdrop to a bigger agenda), his twenty-first century approach is also more methodical, because much better-informed. Randall Robinson is more positively radical in his interrogation of the foundations of white American and Western civilisation (s), with Black Africa (the difference is noteworthy) and Egypt much more cogently featured in his revisionist plea.

But again, the perspective I stake in my thesis is implicitly that though African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans chronologically precede Diop in raising the question of a Black Egypt, the main issues all of them (diasporic and African intellectuals) engage were already part of the consciousness of the African masses before slavery created the Black diaspora -- and already in that consciousness before Diop was born. Secondly,

quantitatively and, arguably also qualitatively, the prolific Diop did more, through the consistency of his output and the research which went into his works, to make this particularly Black discourse an official thematics of modern historiography. The point is analogous to the insufficiency of written records in Black Africa (or in Black America sometime in the past) and the consequent reliance at times on Greek and Arab sources. None of this invalidates the current African and Black diasporic intellectual claim that Blacks (in Africa and elsewhere) have always known who they really are and how long they have been on this Earth, in spite of what crises of representation in the educated élite might suggest. We note, in passing, that nothing in the state of current Western historiography -- notice its obvious lack of objectivity -- proves the latter's inherent epistemological superiority to the oral tradition of history and historiography which is supposed to lack sophistication.

Even in its creolist (thoroughly hybrid, racially mixed) engagement of Négritude and Afrocentrism, the Caribbeanness Edouard Glissant foresees, or wishes, for his native Martinique is incomplete without a coming to grips with the pre-Caribbean subjectivity which is still in the subconscious. What strikes the reader of Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* are his thorough familiarity with myth and the unconscious, and his ultimate argument in the book that no people has ever survived and thrived without first securing and solidifying its grip on these two mysterious dimensions of reality; for, through them, and only through them, is a people able to glimpse intimations of its truest soul (235-236). However, the Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Canadian, etc. communities are not ancient enough to have formulated myths of origination like the Yoruba and Egyptian ones, to take just two African examples. To the reader of Glissant, therefore, the fact that the myths he deploys in his insightful discussion of Caribbean subjectivity are from elsewhere is consistent. This mobilisation of myths from elsewhere is not a weakness, since many of them are African. Of

particular interest is the figure of ancient Egypt as it erupts into Glissant's modern Caribbean/Antillean consciousness. Significantly, this happens to him in a dream, and the term he uses, on waking up, to designate this apparition is borne out by Egyptian lexicon (234). Also of interest is his accurate observation (in that it is a timely reminder), in referring to the Egyptian *Book of The Dead*, that the foundational text of every great culture is poetic in nature (235-236). It is Aimé Césaire who most explicitly formulates this pre-Caribbean antecedent (Africa) as a problematics of the collective unconscious. According to him, the bedrock that eventually enabled him to ground himself and his poetics was Africa, an alterity he had unconsciously groped for over a long period of time:

Surrealism provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for....in it I have found more of a confirmation than a revelation....If I apply the surrealist approach to my [diasporic] situation....I can summon unconscious forces. This, for me, was a call to Africa....it's true that superficially we are French....if we break with all that, if we plumb the depthswhat we will find is fundamentally black. (83-84)

To understand Césaire's implied suspicion that there had to be a more natural way for him, as artist and ethnic subjectivity, to inflect the French language, consider the following confession by this graduate of the prestigious French *École Normale Supérieure*: "[Surrealism] was a weapon that exploded the French language. It shook up absolutely everything. This was very important because the traditional [French] forms—burdensome, overused forms—were crushing me" (83). If Césaire were writing these words today, he would find Jensen's insight in *A Language Older than Words* interesting:

There is a language older by far and deeper than words. It is the language of bodies.... wind on snow, rain on trees, wave on snow. It is the language of dream, gesture, symbol, memory. We have forgotten this language. We do not even remember that it exists. (2)

Yet, Césaire became aware of this timeless, mystical Africa (as imaged in surrealism) mainly through French writers. This thesis argues that this need not be the case, once Black critical theory rids itself of layers of inhibiting accretion. It was the desire to get

Black critical discourse out of this Western-induced epistemological/discursive strait-jacket that motivated Wilson Harris's rave review of Soyinka's masterpiece, *The Road*. Harris, another obsessed archeologist of knowledge, points out the uncompromising nature of Soyinka's philosophy of writing. What Harris means by the word "complexity" in the title of his article, "The Complexity of Freedom," is essentially a fuller Africa (as consciousness, discourse, texture, etc.), as against the reductive one sublated in Judeo-Christian/Western critical discourse. Referring to the atrophy of consciousness by epistemology that began roughly with the European Renaissance and ended with the colonisation and alienation of the Black intellectual, Harris writes:

Every renaissance is in some degree a crisis of tradition, a crisis of *seeing* or of responding to heterogeneous perspectives that lie half-buried, half-exposed, within the biased conditions of an age that may subconsciously—if not consciously—thwart the prospect of a 're-birth' or a 'resurrection' (52, emphasis added)

Harris's diligent surveillance of the record of history, consciousness, and knowledge correctly sees cubism as a related epistemological phenomenon, a figuration of surrealist sensibility in a different register:

The originality of Picasso, it seems to me, was stimulated at an early age by his profound instinct for the 'mathematics' of African mask and this led him to question symmetries of complacency in Europe and to relate the savage past to the equally savage present in global consciousness. (52)

What the Caribbean Harris implies is that there is a Black subjectivity that is larger than the forcibly exiled one; that there is a subjectivity older than the superficial African agency that resulted from colonisation and independence. In other words, he seeks to identify the deep structures (the set of beliefs underlying it) of Soyinka's uncompromising play:

When one uses the term 'renaissance' one thinks automatically of ancient Greece, Rome, and their renewed impact on Europe centuries ago. What is now at stake perhaps is a phenomenon of pre-Colombian American arts and ancient African masks that speak across history and landscapes to Europe and Asia and bear upon every field of imagination. (52)

For our purposes, this is the dominant impression of the play, in spite of what its eclectic textuality might suggest. That the play is able to project this 'hybrid' perspective without ethnically conceding too much is one of its remarkable features, according to Harris:

The Road beyond a shadow of doubt, I think, is a highly original work within the English language. It bears on the present in that a body of tradition that reflects a cross-cultural movement and evolution of sensibility is at risk as long as societies are in thrall to absolutes (or to absolute dualisms) that seek to deceive or overcome each other by every stratagem of diabolic or military or economic technology.(61)¹

I have been arguing that there is a Black subjectivity that predates modernity and whose zenith was the peaking of ancient Egyptian culture. And the connections are not too difficult to establish: one cannot fully understand *The Road* without an understanding of the mysteries of Ogun (lord of the Road in Yoruba mythology); and we cannot fully historicise Ogun in African civilisation without an understanding of the mysteries of Osiris.² The essence of cubism, what Harris refers to above as "the 'mathematics' of the African mask," is also the essence of surrealism, which has to do with the deep structures of reality as imaged by the African consciousness.

What cubism (the art produced by the group of European artists known as *l'École de Paris* – Pedro Flores, Picasso, Pierre Soulages, Maria Elena Vieira da Silva, and others) has in common with surrealism is that, first, it flourished in Paris at the same time as the latter and that, secondly, both schools of art had been most definitely inspired by Black African art, *l'art nègre*, as Senghor points out in *Ce Que Je Crois* (68, 212-213, 219). Surrealism, like many other cultural concepts Europe and the West took from Africa, was not well-understood. It was misused, because its application was often not preceded by in-depth research. Thus, Stéphane Mallarmé is perceived by some as turning inaccessible poetics into a virtue, and Lautréamont construed surrealism as an unhinged, extremely decentered, playing around with words. From Guillaume Apollinaire through Georges Bataille to Constantin Brancusi, surrealism's obsession with

transgressing bourgeois sentiments in its search for an antidote to the troubled soul of a war-weary Europe unfortunately also prioritised an extremist, sensationalised, lurid, frivolisation of African art. In her discussion of this other side of European surrealism (which Senghor's positive account does not quite raise), Petrine Archer-Straw writes in *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*:

Precursors of Dada and surrealism, such as Guillaume Apollinaire and Marcel Duchamp, had been drawn to l'art nègre as an exotic accessory; but surrealists such as Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, who had come to appreciate black culture through their interest in ethnography, wanted to sensationalize its more lurid qualities further. The negrophilia they advocated was more transgressive than popular sentiment allowed. They went beyond a frivolous aestheticizing towards a 'hard primitivism' involving interest in sexual deviance, fetishism, magic, ritual practices and cannibalism as a way of critiquing and transgressing the norms of European society. Artists such as the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi and the Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti picked up on these trends. (135)

The power of the "impossible" or of the "unknown" which Bataille sought to demonstrate in *Inner Experience* is a mere obfuscating caricature of what full consciousness means to the Black African. The ultimate insult, added to the injury of a long history of Western plagiarism, came in Picasso's assertion that "l'art n'est pas nègre." And so, Michel Riffaterre has either embraced the same irresponsible nativisation, or, in his eagerness to prove that fiction is literally self-reflective and insulated from social reality, he is resorting to distortion and reductionism in order to prove his thesis when he writes in *Semiotics of Poetry*: "to understand the nature of literary language....we [must] recognize that literature [is] a linguistic phenomenon in which form is more important than content, and that this phenomenon is above all a playing with words...." (125, emphasis added). In this section of his book, Riffaterre is discussing surrealism. His summative statement thus reads: "the lesson surrealists meant to teach by their automatic writing [was] that beneath....words there is nothing but more words" (141). If Riffaterre means this literally, I disagree. This definition of surrealism (and of literature) does not quite apply to its originators. "Surrealism" which, not surprisingly, now has a

mostly negative connotation in Western culture, is a label invented not by Africans, but by the artists of the *École de Paris*; for African mysticism is far from being other than real (ity); it is ultra real(ity). To offer a definition of cubism, Senghor quotes approvingly Tristan Tzara's discussion of Picasso's style : "Dans les oeuvres de celui-ci...les éléments apparents, les solides, sont coordonnés dans l'intention d'enlever, à la surface plane de la toile, la tricherie consistant à faire croire qu'elle possède une profondeur réelle" (*Ce Que Je Crois*, 222). And to define African surrealist poetry, the kind that he practices himself, Senghor, like Glissant, first acknowledges the power and foundational significance of poetry: " la parole,...la Poésie [est] dans presque toutes les civilisations, l'art majeur" (119). Collapsing the mystical Word and poetry in order to argue its African origin, he continues: "Majeur surtout en Afrique parce que, dans la poésie, la parole est proférée, agie, sous la forme qui charme le plus parce que la plus active. Et il faut prendre le mot «charme» dans son sens premier, fort, du latin *carmen* "(119). African surrealist poetry differs from its European relative. In the former, according to Senghor,

Les images sont plus que symboliques. La relation entre signifiant et signifié n'est pas seulement pensée; elle est sentie jusqu'à l'identification....Elle est vécue....les images....sontsouvent....des métaphores [parce que] des faits ou, mieux, des tranches de vie vécues.(119, emphases added)

In the poetics and prosody Senghor is discussing, the signified-signifier relation is conceived differently. It may be that an originary conception and function of the Word is no longer accessible the Cartesian Westerner. For this reason, he or she may have gradually concluded that, outside the poetic universe, there is nothing. Regarding this mysticism of the no-nonsense African surrealist poetics, the *Book of The Dead* has already stood the test of time through the other holy scriptures it has inspired, and through its originary conception of poetry which this book itself is. The 'nonsensical', surrealist textual perspective of the *Book of the Dead* is, as Kolpaktchy and others now realise, no nonsense, but another angle on reality (which experimental Western literature

will adopt, as did European Surrealism). Narrative in this book is a foundational conception of poetry, a redescription of reality, to which it is healthy to return every now and then. And Tom Hare is certainly right in asserting that, as a prototype for Christ and other messiahs, Osiris, a central figure in this book, has indeed achieved immortality. African/Black subjectivity thus conceived is far too firmly grounded in its historicity and referential actuality to be too perturbed by what Descartes's egotistic *cogito ergo sum* sought to prove to itself. This other subjectivity, anchored in what Senghor refers to accurately as "l'Afrique des profondeurs" (again, to be distinguished from the superficial subjective agency that resulted from colonisation) is, by and large, unperturbed by the current twists and turns in Western philosophy and art. All indications in the trend of current critical theory point to its imminent reinstatement. In Pickstock we are offered the spiritual consequences for the modern world of the West's periodised, reductive formulations of consciousness; in Martha Nussbaum's recent *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, we have the emotional consequences of this compartmentalisation of awareness; and in Jensen's *A Language Older Than Words* we are painstakingly shown how this self-deception on the part of the West has gradually insinuated itself into politics, economics, globalisation, etc. The West, Jensen argues, has decided to insulate itself and believe its own virtual reality. These are the palpable socio-economic consequences in the twenty-first century of what began in very ancient history as an epistemological sleight-of-hand.

In his generally lucid discussion of the true meaning of surrealism and its epistemological significance as a discursive counterforce, Jean-Claude Blachère points out how the kind of alternative understanding it suggests can even help understand the politics of historiography. To him, it can also show how Western onto-epistemological discourse can choose to present reality not as it more plausibly is, but as it wants it figured:

En 1950, le groupe surréaliste elabora un «almanac du demi-siècle», où il recensait en un calendrier inoui les événements marquants selon son point de vue. C'était là une tentative, apparemment ludique, mais en réalité gravement significative, de bâtir une autre chronologie pour aboutir à une nouvelle conception de l'histoire. (24, emphases added)

Blachère is here referring to that which both Breton and non-European Surrealists agreed on: Western civilisation as it was being presented through European history was inaccurate in many respects; that it amounted to an invention (of Europe). Here is Blachère again; he points out that Breton (like Michael Rice) was aware that Western historians knew better than what they had been saying:

Mais Breton n'avait pas attendu le demi-siècle pour nier que le miracle grec, l'expansion romaine, la naissance de Jésus-Christ fussent les points de départ de notre histoire. «L'esprit latin» se voyait incriminé dès les premiers grands textes idéologiques. (24, emphases added)

This equation of surrealism with alternative epistemology takes us back to surrealism in Césaire's native Caribbean. Blachère, quoting Breton, writes:

Les peuples de couleur—tout particulièrement noir et rouge—[...] sont restés les plus près des sources....La pensée dite "primitive" [...] vous reste moins étrangère qu'à nous autres et [...] d'ailleurs se montre étrangement vaillante dans le vaudou haïtien.(30)

Vodou, to its adepts, is not a dimension of reality or state of consciousness that lacks a coherent inner logic. In "Haitian Vodou: The Distinct Self and the Relational World" (which features in Runzo's and Martin's *The Meaning of Life in the World Religions*), Karen McCarthy Brown's very modern reading of Vodou demonstrates white American prejudices. In addition to using the voodoo or vodou (these spellings do not have the purely negative connotation of the Anglo-American "voodoo") motif in his fiction, Ishmael Reed, in countless interventions (e. g. in his discussion with Ruth Abbott and Ira Simmons in Dick and Singh's *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*), explains the true nature of this perspective on life and Judeo-Christian reactions to it as a competing faith or philosophy in the Americas. It may be no accident that the cradle of voodoo, West Africa, is also where in Africa one finds some of the strongest traces of ancient Egyptian

belief-systems in praxis (not just in archeology or in tourism, as is the case in present-day islamised Egypt). Traces of ancient Egypt can be found among the Dogon (Mali), the Lebu (Senegal), and the Yoruba. Marcel Griaule's classic *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* and Pathé F. Diagne's *L'Europolosophie Face à La Pensée du Nègro-Africain*, the present-day ritual practices of the Lebu-Wolof, and the Nigerian Archdeacon J. Olumide Lucas's doctoral thesis at the University of Durham (*The Religion of the Yorubas: Being an Account of the Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Yoruba Peoples of Southern Nigeria, Especially in Relation to the Religion of Ancient Egypt*), all mention these Black African traces of ancient Egypt. Though southern Bénin (formerly Dahomey, and later known as the People's Republic of Bénin) and southern Togo are the cradle of vodou, the traditional belief-systems of all five West African countries have much in common.

Surrealism, which its African and Africanist practitioners and specialists equate with fuller consciousness, is a notion African artists and theorists have been trying for decades to have acknowledged as a genuine component of what is called Reality. I have dwelt on the question of surrealism at some length in order to firmly ground it in consciousness, so as to posit a certain idea of memory. Likewise, in his contribution to the collection *Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory: Appropriating Historical Traditions*, Donald Phillip Verene, in his essay "Two Sources of Philosophical Memory: Vico Versus Hegel," deplores in present-day philosophical theory what he calls "the barbarism of reflection." The collection itself, it is important to note, asks the following question:

What task remains for philosophy? It often has been observed that we find ourselves at the end of this century amid the husks of pragmatism, the rubble of analysis, and the regular litany of moribund pronouncements on the practice of philosophy. So what could be the future of philosophical activity? What remains of the philosophical enterprise that has not become terminally introverted, wholly effete, or alarmingly indistinguishable from other sorts of enterprises? (1)

Defining this barbarism, Verene writes: "The barbarism of reflection comes about through the attraction to "intelligibility" or abstraction as a guide to life and thought" (44).

Verene is of interest to us here because of what he says about the origin of Vico's philosophy of history:

Vico's *storia ideale eterna* is a cycle of the three ages of *dèi*, *eroi*, and *uomini* (gods, heroes, and humans), which he claims to take from the Egyptians....All of the elements of this history are in the engraving or *dipintura*....It is a complete picture of the science, the complete speech done as a graphic. The objects depicted function as *topoi* from which Vico can draw forth all that there is to say. They are [a] set of hieroglyphics....which give him access to what he calls the "common mental language" or "mental dictionary," in which resides the *sensus communis* or communal sense of humanity. (45)

If the Egyptians already, in essence, said everything there is to say (not in the sense that things are literally immutable, but in the sense of having formulated a theory of reality which is ultimately richer than the paltry periodisation modernity often deludes itself into equating with a certainty made possible by Cartesian rigour), we must agree that Western critical theory is, in a sense, a rewriting of African theory; and not the other way around. And this proposition might help us better understand literary theory. It is this essentially eternal nature of Egyptian thought, recuperable only through long cross-Atlantic racial memory for work to be done today in Black critical theory, that has motivated the Afro-American theorist Jacob H. Carruthers and other Egyptologists in their efforts to retheorise the Black diaspora subjective agency. But first, here is how Verene formulates this new deployment of an ancient perspective:

Vico's *New Science* moves the classical doctrine of prudence, as the study of the lives and actions of great historical figures, onto the study of the whole of history. This study, in Vico's terms, is the apprehension of providence in history....*prudentia* depends on *providentia*. The perception of the providential order of history, which is the perception of history as cycle, is what Vico offers to the alternatives....of the blind fortune of chance (*cieca fortuna* or *caso*) of Epicurus and the deaf necessity (*sorda necessità*) of Descartes and the Stoics. The true is the whole, and only the wisdom that comes from the grasp of the whole can issue in true prudence.(51)

Verene, by the way, points out how it is impossible to fully understand *Finnegans Wake* without realising what Joyce owes Vico's *New Science* (48).

On the question of an alternative subjectivity and of a broader, more profound, apprehension of history, what St. Clair Drake's two-volume *Black Folk Here and There* accomplishes is the application of a historical and anthropological perspective to race theory. His is clearly one of the truly deft Afro-American anthropological interventions in Egyptology. Having already (above) unapologetically proclaimed the psycho-social motives that interpellated him as a particular ethnic "I" to explain what role he understands himself, as an intellectual, to be playing in what is a real war of competing ideas, Drake informs us that the autochthonous inhabitants of ancient Egypt were "a basically Negro indigenous population" (*Black Folk*, Vol. 1, 129). This fact by itself might sound inconsequential, until we realise its full significance for the history of ideas and race theory:

Folklore during dynastic times reveals a willingness to accord high status to black mythological figures such as Osiris, whose origins were predynastic. This is relevant to a discussion of the Neolithic Revolution that took place during the Predynastic Period. Osiris, who became Judge of the Dead during Old Kingdom days, was previously a culture hero associated with the food-producing revolution. A tradition exists suggesting that other peoples in Africa [e.g., the Yoruba] and the Middle East, during Egypt's Predynastic Period, considered Osiris [Ogun] a culture hero as well. (1991, 165)

The idea of a god (Osiris) sitting at the head -- i.e., at the inception -- of Christianity (i. e., as the prototypical self-sacrificing Redeemer in human spirituality, predating Christianity); a god who is not white, and does not have blue eyes and long, wavy hair, may be for the twenty-first century Westerner and Judeo-Christian a horrifying thought to countenance; but the anthropologist Drake is adamant:

The Egyptian people themselves cherished a version of their own predynastic history that was embodied in legend and mythology. It has relevance to our inquiry into the connotations of color. It was a story cherished in many varied versions throughout Egyptian history until it was obliterated by the Near Eastern origin myths that Christianity and Islam imposed upon Egypt. The emergence of civilization was attributed to a culture hero of Upper Egypt in the sacred land near the first cataract of the Nile. He was god in a complex theological system as well as a culture hero—Osiris... (166)

Christianity and Islam, which do not like to be reminded of their Pagan origins, did not literally obliterate this Black religion; It is more accurate to say that they actually availed themselves of its origin myths and liturgies. Here is Drake on the original Virgin Mary and infant Jesus:

During the late Roman Empire the worship of Isis spread widely from the Nile Valley, with shrines established in Spain, Italy, and Gaul. Although it was obvious (from the myth surrounding the cult and the location of her shrine at Philae, where the most Negroid part of Egypt and Ethiopia meet) that the goddess was not white, she was sometimes portrayed in statues as a Roman matron. She symbolized the ideal wife and mother, and she may have been the forerunner of the Christian iconography of Madonna and child. In Egypt and Ethiopia it was her role as Mother Goddess who assured fertility...that attracted simple people to Isis, and she and Hathor were often merged in the popular mind.(171-172)

Joseph Campbell, in PBS television interviews with Bill Moyers (and possibly also in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*), is more categorical and asserts that these Egyptian figures were indeed the prototypes for Mary and Christ. Jacob H. Carruthers's contribution to Afro-American Egyptology lies in a fine formulation of moral philosophy which appears to have successfully handled many of the methodological issues critics do not see addressed in Afrocentricity, a topic I will briefly return to later. On the issue of methodology, I am engaging Carruthers instead of other Black diaspora Egyptologists because his discussion of such issues as authentic reminiscence, transcendence, and representation, makes him more pertinent to my literary interest here. First, Carruthers quietly resolves an issue which had for quite some time unnecessarily bogged down Black critical theory, i.e., whether or not ancient Africa truly had a real philosophical tradition. Those, like Kwame Anthony Appiah in *In My Father's House* who, arguing from the perspective of strict analytic philosophy or having a different sense of history, claim all Africa has ever had is folk wisdom, will be disappointed that Carruthers chooses not to be drawn into the controversy; does not waste time arguing that point. Carruthers does not even try to debunk the aura of respectability or implied superiority of (Western) philosophy (in relation to other disciplines), as Richard Rorty and others have been

doing; he simply willingly concedes the term "philosophy" to those who do not believe in this African tradition, if this will make them happy. Carruthers then opts for what he calls "deep thought." He articulates his intervention around the twin issues of "the meaning of eternity" and "the meaning of time". Like Vico, Carruthers ponders the epistemological significance of the concept of eternity, not as a static absolutism, but as that which Greek philosophy fatally jettisoned from what it had got from the Egyptians. To him, the emergence of Greek thought, understood as the arrival of the Logos or reasoned speech, was the birth of the signs of alienation ("Signs of Death," according to Pickstock), because it was absolutist. Through an exegesis of the four couples constituting The Eight Infinite Ones of the Egyptian Ogdoad, Carruthers isolates the fourth couple of *Amun* and *Amunet* as standing for the humanly unachievable principle of omniscience, or that which is hidden. Carruthers is, therefore, able to argue that the concept of Amun (which may not be related to the god Amun) "is ultimately the epistemological statement *par excellence*" (50). And this is because "the meaning of eternity in its entirety is unknowable to those living on top of the earth" (50). One of Carruthers's appropriately radical arguments is that even such discourses as Freudian psychology and Marxism that aspired to supplant the Judeo-Christian paradigm are inadequate and hypocritical for not being bold enough, or for simply being ill-informed, on the issue of the significance of Black Africa in the history of ideas. Here is Carruthers: "Their fledgling attempts not only ignore the African base for trans-experiential wisdom, but they also attempt to objectively analyze and dissect the thought process which is what Freud did to theology. The circle of alienation does not yet appear to be broken...."(105). Because the history of ideas as told by the West is warped, the Afro-American subjectivity is equally arrested in its emancipation:

The question that confronts us now is whether African thought has any future and if so in what sense....African thought has contributed.... to the three major thought systems of the "Western World"....This influence was acknowledged by

....Indo-European [figures, including]....Moses of the House of Levi, the Hebrew prophet *par excellence*.(173-174)

But, like Drake, Carruthers observes that, all in all, racism is a recent aberration, compared to the total history of humankind: "It was only in the modern era that [African cultures] were virtually arrested due to the most aggressive campaign of oppression in history." However,

Still it was the "good old African thought" that provided the foundation for the new nationalism that has impelled African peoples toward liberation. The preservation of that spirit inspired the unceasing resistance movements on the Continent and sustained the free and independent communities of the diaspora. In other cases, where there was severe excommunication of Africans through Western education or other forms of cultural genocide, the quest for the African connection....laid the foundation for our project of restoration.(173-174, emphasis added)

I have suggested that Carruthers's book is no mean scholarly achievement, for he adroitly combines Pan-Africanist nationalism with informed reading of the history of philosophy. And so, if we try to harness the concept of the African creative Word to Carruthers's immediate, local, African-American predicament, we cannot but summarise his philosophical argument thus: what confers transcendence on the inadequately represented African-American agency that white America insists on privileging as the constitutive factor of Blackness is this Black subjectivity's obstinate refusal to see itself as static *telos*.

The rise and privileging of hybridity as a concept in postcolonial theory was due in no small measure to the rise of postmodernism; specifically, the rather irresponsible version of it which propounds a gratuitous problematisation or outright rejection of every enduring subjectivity or paradigm. This version reinscribes, with subtlety, what is essentially a late capitalist and globalist deception that is intent on bringing everything and everybody within its sphere of influence by first stripping it of any remnants of essentialist subjectivity that it does not like. It does not like these, because such remnants are recalcitrant and often contestatory of what they see as a largely

unchanged Judeo-Christian and Euro-American monopoly on discourse. The influence of extremist postmodernism is waning because of a crisis in ethics and critical theory, as stated, for example, above by the editor of *Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory*. The excessive relativisation of everything (and the serious misunderstandings it has led to) has lost its initial appeal (as James Snead found out) as a promising avenue to freedom and equality. It seems fair, therefore, to say that the thrust of Caroline Rody's recent book, *The Daughter's Return: African American and Caribbean Women's Fiction of History* is rather misguided. Blinkered by the hybridity vogue, Rody would have her reader believe that the horizontal Black subjectivity she identifies in her reading of "African American and Caribbean revisionary historical fictions" (203) is the one that most adequately narrativises Black subjectivity. The gendered "horizontal notion of identity" (205) she privileges is based on a "cross-ethnic relationship" (207) which, while noble in itself, is in danger of producing a neutered identity which is not anchored in any material history. This is what the following assertion suggests: "the past, finally, cannot be recovered. It has escaped us, and so must we escape it, if we hope to fulfill its best promises" (211, emphasis added). Rody's theory of subjectivity is predicated on a local, creolist, and free-floating reading of Black history that, at bottom, restricts its purview to the Americas. It ultimately theorises Black subjectivity along one axis only; this perspective is characteristic of Western epistemology.

The ontological danger for Black subjectivity inherent in a postmodernism insulated from essentialism of any kind is the subject of Michael J. C. Echeruo's above-mentioned recent article, "An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project". He recognises the seductive appeal of creolist theories:

The problem with those who try to understand the diaspora through the Enlightenment....[and] those who have a problem choosing where they belong is that they cannot quite get themselves to realize that their options in the matter are very limited indeed. Put bluntly, they have none. Paul Gilroy does not have a choice of identities. It is a spurious sermon therefore to speak (as Gilroy does)

in this context of the "instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being made".... What the history of the diaspora teaches us is that black identity must always be predicated on black experience, and to whatever extent possible, on the experience of those others touched enough by black blood to identify themselves with it. Nothing in that act of commitment restricts the growth of the inside. (8-9)

Echeruo's point is that there is a real danger in not having a good sense of history. To formulate a theory of any Black subjective agency based on the periodisation/truncation of history that was the Enlightenment (and its values), results in an ultimately inadequate constitution of subjectivity, a position also suggested by Charles W. Mills, above.

But this chapter is about the diaspora and Egypt. This community's recuperation of the ultrareal as consciousness does not have to stop in Black Africa, where most of this diaspora's ancestors came from. It should go all the way to where the ultrareal as consciousness reached its zenith in Africa: Egypt. On how surrealism should be understood as the expansion of consciousness, or as what he appropriately calls "possibilités illimitées", Kolpaktchy writes:

En vertu [de l'] intuition mystique infaillible [du peuple égyptien] l'Égypte était devenu la terre sacrée du surréalisme, du vrai. Le caractère bizarre, inédit, des images qu'elle nous offre, la dislocation des perspectives, le coq-à-l'âne hybride de toutes les associations visuelles ou idéologiques, l'obsession hallucinatoire des tableaux de l'Au-delà, tout réussit à mettre sur pied une «réalité» qui n'est pas d'ici-bas et qui contredit nos habitudes de pensée. C'est précisément cette vaste zone qu'aborde le «Livre des Morts» (55, emphases added)

Surrealism, therefore, becomes subsumed within the larger paradigm of memory, and memory functions as a transgressive force that complicates and undermines stratagems that are inimical to Black cultural vitality. For our purposes, here is what I consider Blachère's summative statement:

L'indice de vitalité d'une société sauvage est sa capacité à produire des objets où s'inscrivent ses affects, à apporter à l'humanité le frisson du mystère. Lorsqu'une communauté ne fabrique plus que des copies, lorsqu'elle a oublié elle-même le sens de ses mythes, elle n'est plus vivante. L'art négro-africain, en pleine décadence au moment de la colonisation, ne peut plus fournir du nouveau, sinon exceptionnellement par des découvertes de plus en plus rares. (28, emphasis added)

Blachère's comments on the condition of African art-forms is fair, considering the Black historical 'amnesia' I have been discussing. Only after present-day Africa and the portion of the Black diaspora that still values its African roots recover from the amnesia that caused them to forget much of the corpus of their foundational myths and their profound meanings and potential, will Black literature be able to produce masterpieces more frequently. For then, works like Ben Okri's marvellously surrealist novel *The Famished Road* and Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (which uses the Egyptian motif, among others), will not be rarities in Black fiction; there would be more such works, and more frequently enough to revolutionise Black fiction. When, at the beginning of a BBC TV interview, Okri told the British interviewer that, contrary to what he (the interviewer) had just said, the novel was experimental and mimetic, that it was fiction and reality, the interviewer was visibly baffled. My understanding of Okri's point, however, is that his novel thematises the possibility of the impossible, the same perspective on reality ("dislocation des perspectives") that Kolpakchty points out as characterising *The Book of the Dead*. Randall Robinson's prescription, therefore, makes a lot of sense: "To be large and formidable and masterful again—to be whole again—blacks need to know the land of their forebears when its civilizations were verifiably equal to any in the world" (60, emphasis added). I have been arguing that the literary potential in current Black Egyptology is very real. In Jean Toomer's experimental masterpiece, *Cane* -- which, in terms of sheer originality, is arguably the work that capped the Harlem Renaissance novels -- and in Erna Brodber's marvellous choreographing of consciousness which culminates in the epiphany of the racial self in *Myal*, Black Africa is only a distant regulating kernel. By straddling Africa and the Black diaspora, Armah's *Osiris Rising*, as it were, projects on a larger Pan-African scale what I read as a diasporic unconscious textual desire (in *Cane* and *Myal*) for plenitude; and the object of such a desire is plausibly Africa. In Armah's novel, the poet's Africa is narrativised cross-Atlantically as

the circumscribed racial subjectivity through the recovery and deployment of the mythical story *par excellence* that codifies the triumph of human consciousness: the myth of Osiris. It is to this fictional register of the vertical axis of Black subjectivity in all three novels that we now turn.

IV. Pan-African(ist) Narrative Intersubjectivity in Ayi Kwei Arma's *Osiris Rising*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Erna Brodber's *Myal*

With *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*, Ayi Kwei Armah takes the African/Black novel to its logical conclusion: a novelistic, metafictional, 'meditation' on the Word. Because inspired by the originary Black and Egyptian mystical/divine Word, the novel is both a homecoming and a new beginning. Armah seems to have pushed the novelistic word as far as it can go by explicitly making it revisit the original Word. He thus "returns" the creative word to its original site of enunciation and to its divine, mystical prototype at "the cradle of religious wisdom." Armah does this in a less 'frivolous' manner than Reed does in *Mumbo Jumbo*. In other words, there is less emphasis on playfulness in *Osiris Rising*. The performative role Armah gives language here ruptures common ideas and boundaries of the word (mostly secular) which even his own readers are used to, though the thematic shift can be teleologically accounted for, and could have been predicted by any alert reader of Armah's works. He effects this move by circumventing the traditional role the West assigns language as Logos (voice of reason), and by sounding the mystical properties of the Word as it was originally willed into being and enunciated in ancient Africa. This ritualisation of language is akin to Pickstock's "resurrection of the Sign," a recovery of the sundered body of the devalued modern word as signifying sign/system. Such a

narrative shift makes the novel amenable to a liturgical reading. Philosophically and structurally, *Osiris Rising* is a representation of a racial (Pan-Africanist) structure of being and, as such, can be usefully placed in intertextual 'dialogue' with two equally densely coded texts in the Black novelistic tradition which thematise an ontology: Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Erna Brodber's *Myal*. Due to the mystical and liturgical modality *Osiris Rising* prioritises over the secular, it marks the beginning of a metafictional story and figuration of the Word. It is the story of the prototype of all stories, a signal representation of Osiris as "the fulfillment of all signs" (Pickstock). I say "beginning," because one can already anticipate a sequel to *Osiris Rising*. Armah is a case of an artist quarrelling with his culture and quickly losing patience; not at its lack of resources, but at its inertia. In order, therefore, to brand his message on its consciousness, Armah executes what is in a sense a radical thematic and narrative swerve that happens to be on a par with Toomer's and Brodber's own urge to experiment with form in their philosophy of composition in order to represent a dying, changing, or reemerging Black mode of being. This is what accounts for what I see as all three novels' special status in the history of the Black novel cross-Atlantically. *Osiris Rising* is a particular, essentially mystical, figuration of reality which required a stylistic difference. The style of Armah's previous novels would have been rather unsuitable here. If Armah had written this novel in any other register, it is doubtful that the effect would have been the same; for as liturgical symbolisation of the body of Osiris, of Africa, and of the structure of Black consciousness, the texture of *Osiris Rising* required a fresh narrative protocol. In a single impulse to weave words together to explore the mystery and redemptive potential of the mystical Word as proffered at the beginning of humankind's spiritual and cultural adventure in Africa, Armah needed a new mythical structure to carry a story, much of whose setting is present-day Africa. The imaginary in *Osiris Rising* is, therefore, enabled by an effusion of appropriate images, metaphors, and symbols which surged in

Armah or the narrator to make possible an organic adequation or coincidence of sign and content, give structure to consciousness and thought, and recover racial and cultural memory. By significantly breaking from the narrative strategies of his previous novels and realigning their coding systems, Armah inflects the insufficient secular word to authorise notions of alterity that are gnostic. He tests the conventions of realism that the Western novelistic form has used to narrativise Blackness as subjectivity and phenomenology, and finds their protocols profoundly inadequate. Instead of the two-dimensional binarism of classical and the modern Western novel's account of Black ontology, *Osiris Rising* is a multidimensional transmutation which reinstates the mystical and metaphysical within the modern and secular. Considering Armah's entire oeuvre, a related result of this experimentation is that a (second) kind of alterity emerges in the form of a later work by Armah – i. e., *Osiris Rising* – which enables us to propose a second, teleological reading of Armah's previous works.

To draw attention to the extent to which we take for granted the nature of the language used to grasp the contours of Blackness, Armah, as it were, transmutes prevailing novelistic conventions by imitating or alluding to them. At the same time, he reverses them in order to undermine them so as to point out their inauthenticity and inadequacy. He does this, in order to project an original way of perceiving and expressing the totality of the Black experience at a particular time in world history. It begins with historical and narratological metalanguage on pages six and seven when Armah juxtaposes two modes of perception and of temporality: the author of *Journey to the Source* operates in the linear superficiality of a present time characterised by the commercialisation of intellectual production and art. Ast, one of the main characters in Armah's novel, by contrast, 'slips' out of the present and into ancient times and characters and back. The recovery of the thematics of liturgy and its (re) introduction into the circuit of Black novelistic practice is part of a necessary act of memory to locate

the quintessence of ethnic ontology at a time, dominated by Western high theory, when it is fashionable to unhinge every ontology from its moorings. That *Osiris Rising* seems to have caught the casual Armah reader by surprise also raises the issue of the inscribed reader whom I will equate with the new Black theorist in Chapter V. Those, like Ode Ogede and even Leif Lorentzon, who have commented on the novel seem unable to fully account for its 'oddness' within the solely secular, postcolonial, Marxist, critical discourses they have long devised to read Armah. Or, they simply do not mention the 'oddness', thereby suggesting a homogeneity in Armah's overall oeuvre/style. The novel's eponymous title signals its status as an act to counter death and oblivion and, from a strictly stylistic point of view, to remedy the effeteness of novelistic practice. Armah reformulates the problematics of the essence of Blackness in terms of the mystical quest for meaning by activating the rather neglected theme of gnostic alterity. His is a liturgical representation in time of the Word as Osiris and as Africa. As mystical and quest fiction, Armah's novel displaces and projects onto present-day Black culture an ancient myth which, in its Pan-Africanist import, makes the liturgical body of Osiris and associated archetypical symbols grounding ideas for a Black renaissance just underway.

Osiris Rising invokes the future it desires for Black culture by stepping outside the template of the often racialised language of Christianity and European modernity. It deploys a ritualised form of language only within which it is possible to posit the power of language as liturgical logos that participates in a *pleroma* of inexhaustible Black self-supplementarity, as was intended in ancient African cults. *Osiris Rising* first liberates the originary African divine and creative Word from the contexts of its extreme devaluation and modern abstraction, in order to proceed to probe its inner dynamics. The multiple effects of the originary Word or liturgical Sign override the protocols of the Judeo-Christian, Western absolutist Sign in which Blackness has been represented, and in

which its destiny has been forecast. Thus, the opening lines of the novel are posited as, or in, a cognitive modality. As exordium, they place a formulaic emphasis on the importance of correct perception, cognition, and understanding:

From far off, it looked like an ellipse mounted on a cross. Close up, it was a female form, arms outstretched, head capacious enough to contain the womb. The day she asked its name, her grandmother Nwt turned an incredulous smile on her. "Ankh Life."...

.... Ast push[ed] to know the reason beneath ...[questions] raised more intractable questions in Ast's mind....did [ancient history] still have the energy of news, with power to shape the future?

At first she tried to find answers to the questions unsettling the balance of her soul where she was born. Then she grew past hoping answers could be found. She understood they would have to be created. (1, emphases added)

Osiris Rising features here one of its structuring metaphors: the ankh -- the archetypal, prototypical symbol of life. The ankh is a 'masterplot' in that it is the representation or visualisation of the duality of the official (distorted and suppressed) and the true, of the manifest and the hidden, of the written and the unrepresentable. Various forms of the ankh still exist in the sacred and secular art-forms of present-day Africa, especially traditional Africa. In Armah's native Ghana and among the Twi- or Akan-speaking people of Côte d'Ivoire, one of its secular forms is the Akwaba doll (oversided head and outstretched hands), commonly referred to by foreigners as the Ashanti doll. In the essay "The External Encounter: Ambivalence in African Arts and Literature," Soyinka touches on similar features in the arts of the Bakota and the Nimba in Africa:

A Bakota Ancestral Guardian figure from the Dan peoples, its head bears a vague suggestion of the frontal view of a Sphinx, impactedThe Nimba mask of the Baga peoples...is a pure expression of organic dominance ...[through] metaphysical symbols...[whose] ponderous eruption is an embodiment of the numinous world...[it reflects] the cosmos in oval and spherical masses and voids, whose spatial relations provide an infolding aesthetic. The head echoes the lower womb-world. Together they constantly reproduce the unseen....it is the head whose thrust into space so massively defies gravity that it has led more than one enthusiast -- William Fagg and Margaret Plass for instance -- to speculate that African sculptors discovered the exponential principle long before their European scientific counterparts.

This figure does not even see with its eyes which are mere lumps, does not evince the slightest hint of a capacity for sensual perception: it absorbs the world directly into this head, then envelops its people in the plenitude of its womb. (1988, 221-222)

Soyinka merely touches on these tropes of fullness and of inexhaustible life in passing. For us, they can be mined for narrative and theoretic insight. In *Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians*, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy update the average Westerner on things known to many in other parts of the world, but largely unauthorised in Western discourse:

The Christian myth cycle suggests that the original source of the Christian image of the cross is the ubiquitous Egyptian cross the ankh. This ancient symbol was so important to Christians that they tooled it into the leather cover of one of the collections of gospels found at Nag Hammadi...[it] represents the archetypal potentiality of the *pleroma*. The ankh shows the *pleroma* as delineated by the horizontal axis of the cross, just as it is in Christian mythology. Below the circle the *kenoma* is cut in two by the descending vertical axis of the cross, representing the Mystery made manifest through duality. The ankh is expressing the idea of syzygy[sic] – the One as two. (158)

Freke's and Gandy's historicisation of the Christian icon goes on to point out the Osirian prototype the Christian cross is modelled on:

Christ, representing universal Consciousness, embodies all the archetypes of the *pleroma* united through Gnosis and is, therefore, a symbol of the whole made up of many parts. Christ is the one Consciousness which appears as the many separate seeds of consciousness which are trapped in ignorance and seeking liberation through living a human life. The Oneness of the Christ is fragmented when it passes beyond the Cross of light into the *kenoma*. Drawing on imagery from the myth of the Pagan Godman Osiris, (and his Greek alter-ego Dionysus), *The Book of the Logos* imagines this as the Christ being dismembered into many limbs.(155)

Further, Freke and Gandy state that "The Christian myth transforms our understanding of Jesus's crucifixion, revealing it to be a symbolic reflection of archetypal events" (154), thus casting in theogonic perspective the story of Jesus as a representation of an anterior, non Judeo-Christian event of cosmic significance. Commenting on a related issue, Michael Rice, like Diop and others before him, helps us see Christ and subsequent mystical luminaries and leaders in perspective:

It was Egypt's particular destiny to have been the first human community to harness the power of human consciousness by releasing the power of the archetypes. In doing so the people made a significant contribution to the management of complex societies and, in the process, contributed to the transformation of mankind. (53)

The head in the Armah ankh and in the Bakota and Nimba figures contains the fractal, impacted matrix of plenitude and possibility, an ecstatic and ongoing arrival of reality that has an edge on the mere, often academic, periodisation of reality that passes as objectivity, before succumbing to the hubris of absolutisation. These, then, are some of the ancient, cultic parameters within which to appreciate the mystical and liturgical tropology of the novel's narrative act. Freke and Gandy's comments on Gnostic spins on the *pleroma* are, therefore, quite *à propos*. They elaborate on the ability of the truly enlightened to mediate the duality of consciousness: "The circle and the cross represent that which is whole and that which is divided – the essence and the appearances, the Mystery and the manifest, the *pleroma* and the *kenoma*. Understanding the relationship between the poles of this fundamental duality is the key to the realization of Gnosis" (159). On the manifest and the hidden, literalist and gnostic apprehensions, their comment is equally pertinent:

The individuals around the Cross are the spiritually dead – the seeds of Consciousness still lost in the ignorance of the *kenoma*. Those who are "in the Cross" represent the spiritually resurrected. They have 'one form' because they have seen through the illusion of separateness and realized their essential Oneness with all that is. They have died the *eidolon* and been reborn as the Christ. They are the limbs of the dismembered Christ that have been reunited. (157)

It is in the above sense that the character Ast, conceived as a mystical complement to the male principle, is remarkable in Armah's entire oeuvre. She is not just a female character, but the embodiment of the female principle indispensable to the male-female mystical union that signals the realisation of the gnosis; the rebinding of that which was one and whole. On this point, by the way, critics who condemn the "excess" of male-female sex in Armah's works fail to appreciate its mystical meaning. At the core of Egyptian gnosticism/mysticism is the injunction on the individual to turn inward to seek the perennial Truth. This quest, which involves a close attention to the deep structures of the inner self and of buried memory, is precisely what Ast embarks on

in the opening lines of the novel. Her quest is an allegory of Africa's own quest within the obliterating ruse of Judeo-Christian and Western representations of theogony and the African factor in it. In the fictional world of *Osiris Rising*; the idea of turning "betrayal" and "dead history" into "power to shape the future" (1) refers to the structure or nature of the cosmic initiation path: the descent into an abyss of self-knowledge and the reascension into an individual and ethnic consciousness. The Black interrogation of European modernity entailed an epistemological mutation in artistic and philosophic representations of Blackness. Thus, in the literary cosmology that informs the world of *Osiris Rising*, the spiralling structure of this path to eventual light and redemption requires a descent to the abysmal but redemptive archaism of past liturgy and an understanding of the power of language and of the will, in order for the light of day to dawn. Only within this efficacious reconceptualisation of language and consciousness can the racial self be projected and made material. In the novel, the rite of narrativising the Word and the sacrificial body in the process of being resurrected manifests itself through a resistance to the linguistic structures of Western modernity and realism. The mystical style of *Myal* too offers a glimpse into this inner potential of language in the novel's discontinuous and propulsive ritualisation of the Word as it images and mirrors racial essence. *Myal* too enacts a dialectics of simplistic literalism versus gnostic, cultic, depth of apprehension.

The introduction of the book *Journey to the Source* at beginning of *Osiris Rising* has an unnerving effect on Ast, while at the same time acting as additional catalyst which reinforces her resolve. A low ethics and a pandering to trendy fads, made remorseless by perverse marketing etiquette, make of the book and its author an instance of what, in the section entitled "Writing as Capital", a section of 'Part I: The Polity of Death', Pickstock variously refers to as "the language of ownership and materiality," (8) "function[ing] as a mere tool," (8) "sundered from its real occasion" (8). It

is what, in his 1993 American Book Award-winning *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America*, Cornell West calls "the commodification of culture and the commercialization of the arts" (39) in a section which zeroes in on the annoying baggage of postmodern culture: its ability to often wantonly divide the academic Left:

neither the popular nor the academic mind—given the relative lack of a historical sense of both—fully grasp[sic] the major determinants of postmodern culture: the unprecedented impact of market forces on everyday life, including the academy and the art world, the displacement of Europe by America in regard to global *cultural* influence (and imitation), and the increase of political polarization in cultural affairs by national, racial, gender, and sexual orientation, especially within the highly bureaucratized world of ideas and opinions. (39)

Based on what Carruthers says above about the secularisation of language, *Journey to the Source* is a commodification of self and principle in a market economy. By raising the ethno-ethical issues surrounding this book, Armah shows a clear awareness of prevailing market practices and aesthetic theories as they eventually compromise the Black writer's integrity. As Pickstock and West demonstrate copiously, market forces, often imperceptibly, beget and reinforce many of these theories and, just as inconspicuously, impose them as dominant paradigms. Much of capitalism (especially of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries) has this effect on artistic and intellectual productions. Toni Morrison's essay "Home" in *The House that Race Built* (3-12) is an instructive comment of how, to a certain degree, the publisher of *Beloved* made her compromise her racial integrity by forcing her hand at a crucial point in the novel. Morrison is worth quoting at length:

Let me try to be explicit in the ways the racial house [i. e., the claim by some that race is not an issue] has troubled my work.

There was a moment of some significance to me that followed the publication of *Beloved*. It concerns the complex struggle and frustration inherent in creating figuratively logical narrative language that insists on race-specificity without race prerogative.

Someone saw the last sentence of *Beloved* as it was originally written. In fact, it was the penultimate sentence if one thinks of the last word in the book (the resurrection of the title, the character, and the epigraph) as the very last sentence. In any case the phrase "Certainly no clamor for a kiss," which appears in the printed book, is not the one with which I had originally closed the book.

[A] friend railed at my editorand at me....[I] became entangled in what the original phrase had meant , or rather what the original last word of the phrase had meant to me. How long it took to arrive at it, how I thought it was the perfect final word....

The discussion with my friend made me realize that I was still unhappy about [the change] because "kiss" works at a level a bit too shallow. It searches for and locates a quality or element of the novel that was not, and is not, its primary feature. The driving force of the narrative is not love, or the fulfillment of physical desire. The action is driven by necessity, something that precedes love, follows love, informs love, shapes it, and to which love is subservient. In this case the necessity was for [ethnic] connection [through time], acknowledgement, a paying-out of homage still due. "Kiss" clouds the point. (5-7, *passim*)

There are many reasons why the publishing industry and the mainstream, conservative, literary establishment will want to nudge some discourses away from that which they do not want to be reminded of. It is an issue Marshall Frady feels strong enough about to raise to give perspective to his recent biography of Jesse Jackson. He writes:

Any serious consideration of [Black history] in America must begin from one elemental and encompassing circumstance: however familiar and even tiresomely repeated a proposition by now, it nevertheless remains the case that the fundamental American crisis is still that of race. Well before Alexis de Tocqueville, as early as Thomas Jefferson, the recognition was already emerging that the American political adventure, begun in such largeness of possibility, may have also from its very inception – the instant the first black man in chains set foot on this continent's shore – held the dark seeds of its ultimate undoing. That aboriginal crime has been with us ever since..to such a myriad and diffused extent that those conditions and attitudes no longer seem to have any connection to the primal crime that began them. The result is that now we, and in particular those of us who are white, have no real sense of how we continue to be entailed in the lasting consequences of that original great Cain-Act, the systematic brutalization of a whole people. (XI)

Thus, given his philosophy of history and of composition, it is clear that the author (of *Journey to the Source*) in Armah's novel has been seduced into a reinscription of Western forms of constitution of Black subjectivity in the process of appearing to liberalise it for intelligent and modern consumption. Rhetorically, the ethics of *Journey to the Source* is, thus, at odds with the ethical and hermeneutic codes of the text it is embedded in (i. e., *Osiris Rising*), for the former is blinkered by a somewhat unconscious drive towards obliteration, a death instinct. *Osiris Rising's* liturgical poetics outclasses and outwits the ephemera of *Journey to the Source* in which the compromised, defective memory is manipulated into forgetting the racial self. The book-scene – i. e., where

Journey to the Source is featured --immediately precedes the point where *Osiris Rising* begins to register its particular modality and ethnicity more subtly by inserting within the inherited Western novelistic form an ethnic and mystical multidimensionality and timelessness:

Conversations with Nwt turned into voyages. Crossing space and time, the growing Ast stayed up nights with ancestors thousands of years gone puzzling over the motion of stars, wind, flood. Connections. Wonder turned to knowledge of measurable time. She watched kindred priests divide the year ... Her mind met ancestral priestesses, companions...turning desire into myth, naming the myth *Sekhēt larw*, perfect place, evergreen fields of the wandering soul returning home. (7)

The figuration of consciousness doubles as an engagement of the aporetics of time, as Ast partakes of multiple dimensions of being, and we glimpse a wider cosmos in the novel's intimations of parallel or possible worlds. The importance of the fundamental status of time in *Osiris Rising's* poetics of ethnic ontology makes the representation of time part of the liturgical text's rhetorical strategy to point to a historical time -- other than the Judeo-Christian and Western one -- from which to recover ethnic history. Another world, an 'other life', and a different level of awareness erupt into the narrative to temporarily disengage Ast's journey from the exteriority and epistemologic inadequacy of modernity and secular discourse. Prose shifts into a mystical register to become another way of connecting with ancestral homes and archetypal figures of origination. It is a metafictional evocation of thought-process, history, meaning; a time-travel which breaches frontiers and enables conversation with antecedent figures and modes of being in the total morphology of ethnic being or enunciation. Ast's ability to open up and inhabit this site of resistance is an interruption of the effects of domination, a violation of the perspective Black literature has come to associate with a discursive regime like European modernity. The figuration of the disruptive power of "deep thought" (Carruthers) features as counterweight to the protocols of such monistic Western absolutes as Cartesianism, Hegelianism, and realism, which manage to represent only

shadows of Black reality. *Osiris Rising* does not set out to tell us what is most modern about Africa. It sets itself the task of extolling that which is most profound to a people's psyche – long-evolved and archetypal resources which, as my reference to Soyinka later will show, still underpin much of present-day cultural and intellectual thought. It identifies and represents in its fullness the enduring principles which have helped deflect the alienating flux of ideas and events which have characterised the mores of Western perception and representation of the racial Other:

It may look as if all we ever did was endure this history of ruin, taking no steps to end the negative slide and begin the positive turn. That impression is false. Over these disastrous millenia there have been Africans concerned to work out solutions to our problems and to act on them. The traces these markers left are faint....Still, even in defeat the creative ones left vital signs. They left traces of a moral mindpath visible to this day, provided we learn again to read pointers to lost ways. (10)

Armah's novel transmutes history through myth to highlight the power of mysticism and memory to mould the future. By foregrounding an ancient order of being it outwits the linearity of the Western sense of history which, in its dereliction of other dimensions of awareness and time, suffers from an insufficiency which manages to represent only shadows of ethnic alterity:

A nightmare cut into her sleep. In it she struggled with a whirlwind, trying to wake against the tremendous force of oblivion. In vain. Companionless, she pushed forward against the storm....Breathing seemed impossible. There should have been others with her, but when she tried to remember them, memory fled her....Without transition nightmare slipped into dream. Now, just beside her, so close to seem part of her, she had a companion. From where had he come?....The two of them might have sufficed to populate a universe. But there were others....Where now was the pain, the terror of the storm? (57)

Osiris Rising's 'mythicisation' of history is thus an abolition of the Western sense of time as a necessary rhetorical and ontological move without which it is impossible to adequately image and represent a particular kind of Black fictional subjectivity. Within the realm of mythical history are intimations of the potential for scripting a twentieth- and twenty-first century epic. In a century of anxiety and of racial injustice brought on by the closing of the Western mind, there is a need for new metaphors as one of the conditions

of possibility of the modern epic. Thus, "She looked through spirit at Nwn, boundless potential yet in its disorganisation seemingly void of hope. *Jehwty* the divine writer energized her mind for life" (8, emphasis added). All three novels being discussed in the present chapter thematise time, and do so to script the metamorphosed ethnic novelistic mode which trespasses and extends the boundaries of even secular and postcolonial Black reality, to effect a transition into mystical modes of perception where the supernatural intersects the mundane. The Egyptian concept of Nwn is another structuring metaphor in the novel's encoding of an alternative phenomenology of Black presence. As "boundless potential", the concept stands for primordial matter out of which emerge various forms of intelligence. In its repleteness, it exceeds and outwits the written Sign. In *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*, Théophile Obenga offers the following definition:

Thales' *water* is the Egyptian *Nun*. Indeed the Egyptian *Nun* has a universal meaning. It is the primordial element which speaks to the future, to the whole of nature, through the power of *Ra*. ...It is a sort of image-filled theory of *evolution*: First, there is the unorganized matter, *Nun*; then Reason, the organising intelligence, emerges from the matter. (80-81)

80-1 Fractal geometry seems to have harnessed the essence of this way of imaging reality. In its boundless potential, the apparent void of the *Nun* beckons the initiate to apprehend it as an embodiment or precursor of fractal image compression. *Jehwty*, another structuring metaphor, is the authentic African name for the divine inventor of writing before the name was Hellenised to Thoth/Theuth. The figure of *Jehwty*, "the divine writer", is pertinent here in how it affects characterisation in Armah's mainly liturgical fictional world; and in how it frames *Osiris Rising* as a writerly text in this mystical or theological sense. In her own sustained stricture on Derridian philosophy of language and its precursors in Judeo-Christian and Western thought, even Pickstock acknowledges Thoth as no less than the (very) inventor of liturgy:

It is not the least seldom that Theuth's epithets link him with orality – he was “splendid in speech,” “the first to utter command,” and would not only teach the words to be spoken but also the way to speak them. And when Theuth is associated with writing, it is not *deathly* writing, but is closely linked with life....the letters Theuth is supposed to have invented are magical, efficacious, and *liturgical*. He is said to have invented sacred speech, worship, and the language of the gods. (27)

- 80-2 Obenga places *Jehwty* in his proper African perspective as he writes: “Thoth was at the origin of civilization and science: Thoth was the first to discover the science of number (*arithmón*), calculus (*logismòn*), geometry (*geömetrían*), astronomy (*astronomían*), backgammon (*petteías*), dice (*kubeías*), and finally and especially writing (*grámmata*; Plato, *Phadreu*s, 274 c-d.)(97)

Armah features *Jehwty* in a way that sheds light on the writing process in his own novel. Ast's multidimensional mode of consciousness is a comment on the mode of investigation, partly revealed to her in a dream, she needs in her search for Africa. It is also a clue to *Osiris Rising's* own metafictional protocol. It is as if *Jehwty* were challenging Armah's claim to be the sole author of the novel. *Jehwty* insinuates himself into what could have been Armah's linear narrative, takes over the writing process at certain points, inspires and guides Armah and Ast simultaneously to help them avoid the delusion of a realist or modernist representation of Black ontology. Far from suggesting the death of the Black author, this problematics of representation is about how Armah's and Ast's narratives shape themselves through the hidden plenum of *Jehwty's grammata*. In *Osiris Rising's* representation of time, subjectivity is transmuted through synchrony and trans-signification : “She saw time, saw herself in its passage, saw its passage in herself, felt in her soul its energizing flow”(8). Through a process of empathy, Ast is thus the embodiment of the very time through which she sees herself, a geopsychic equation through which self and space are one in Armah's partly spatial poetics of consciousness. By the end of the short first chapter, the novel has posited its main structuring metaphors. They highlight what is special about *Osiris Rising*, and

explain my particular reading of it. As related archetypal symbols, as pillars of gnostic, cultic, and mystic wisdom, the metaphors constitute a new model for imaging racial ontology.

Ast's physical reversal of the Middle Passage is an allegory for the inward journey into herself; "her thoughts turned to the meaning of this crossing [of the Atlantic Ocean]" (11). In the momentum it generates that is then extended northwards to embrace the thematisation of what I, adapting Bernal, call Black Alexandria, the crossing, as we will later see, is allegorical of Black literary theory's own search for an adequate anchor and metalanguage. The process of countering zombification, as we also see in *Myal*, involves the inner reawakening of the individual that leads to the collective awakening from the nightmare of an imposed sense of history. *Osiris Rising* foregrounds its particular cognitive modality as a way of eliciting from Ast and from a collective unconscious an alternative account of Black history and metaphysics. The recurrence of dreams in the novel confirms this reading, and the correspondence here suggested between dreams and textual dynamics is in keeping with the transcendental realm Ast and the novel symbolise. Thus, as Ast again has a nightmare tempered by a dream then back to a nightmare (57), the unconscious is enacting a resistance mechanism that enables Ast to image recent, incomprehensible aggression and even future challenges, as well as the quiet assurance of hope. These dreams and nightmares, a language of the unconscious *moi profond*, are often intimations of challenges ahead. The power of the unconscious to rupture the linearity of historical time mimes the possibility of epical rebirth. It is a manifestation of a genuine, fuller reminiscence. This language is an instance of Martha C. Nussbaum's "nonlinguistic account [or manifestation] of cognition" (7). The meaning of this 'primitive' archetype (elicitation from the subconscious) is extended into a community of like-minded characters bound by a common cause and cast into a dialectical portrayal of the human

and the extrahuman. Collectively, these characters in *Osiris Rising* (and *Myal*) symbolise new vectors of force and hope wherein resides the possibility of epical miracle.

The revelation that the character SSS is impotent, contrary to the appearance that he is a tower of virility, manliness, power, is used to good effect in character profiling. In other words, SSS is a pathetic foil for Ast and Asar. His apparent confidence is deflated as the narrator takes us behind posturings. It is a technique Armah already deftly used to describe impotent, frustrated masculinity in the carefully drawn-out dog-killing scene of the chapter 'Edin' in the novel *Fragments* (1974). A man, suffering from what is probably an advanced venereal disease, has just vented his morbid masculinity on a dog he brutally kills with a pickaxe. A little boy, also the dog's owner who pleaded for his pet's life, looks on, naturally distraught, but about to witness what we might call nature's revenge:

The drip of life came down from the upturned end of the pickaxe. But from the man himself something else had commenced to drip: down along his right leg flowed a stream of something yellow like a long-thickened urine mixed with streaks of clotted blood. A look of terror stopped the man's triumph as first he felt the drip and then looked down to see what it could be. The fallen child had risen. Seeing the humiliation of the killer of his dog, he was now shouting, laughing through his tears,

'Fat balls, heil!'

The boy was still weeping, and the shout had turned his silent grief into a hysterical mixture of suffering for his lost dog and mockery of the killer. (pp. 29-30)

Brodber puts essentially the same technique to effective use to get to the essence behind appearances as Mass Levi is suddenly afflicted erectal dysfunction. Shortly after surviving SSS's assault at the hotel, Ast has yet another dream/nightmare:

She wanted to adjust to the sheet, but her mind kept confusing it with a soft cloud...The cloud turned into a universe of water, algae-green, endless. It covered her yet did not suffocate her. Alone in a boat, she was seeking something small and quick in the sluggish vastness. Flying between waves her boat followed the fish. No matter how fast the boat flew, the fish stayed a constant distance ahead. Ast felt an irresistible need to reach the fish. That instant the boat leapt the distance to the fish, landing on top of it. The fish dived, leaving a spinning hole in its wake.(73)

It is significant that this nightmare immediately follows an attempt to subdue her, and that it precedes other forms of attempted subjugation, physical, intellectual, and professional (administrative). If we try to extrapolate the archetypal significance of this particular transition from one state of consciousness to another – an eruption of the unconscious -- we see Armah offering a variation on the motif of the initiation path of descent and reascension in which Ast enters an archetypal void in order to emerge and achieve the object of her desire – knowledge and plenitude:

She thought back over the last few days. She walked into strange events in an atmosphere turgid with eerie power games played by the impotent. Above that she sensed an overhanging threat to everything she believed in, and to the person who might make the tense time between belief and attainment livable after all.(83)

As the archetypal individual of becoming in whom we see the gradual re-emergence of forgotten aspects of ourselves, Ast, in her dual human and extrahuman essence, is also the embodiment of the desire *Osiris Rising* projects: the desire of epical rebirth and resurrection. Ast's centrality to the novel's figuration of being casts her as the essence of possibility, a foil to the opportunist Cinque. Intelligent, intellectually accomplished, and a psychic, she is the new female principle without which it is hardly plausible to envisage epical rebirth or alternative and uncharted modes of thought and courses of action:

Her interest in [Cinque] had grown out of her desire to understand slavery. On that search she'd imagined the disaster of first capture, the hope of escape, attempts at transcendence, the pitfalls awaiting each enslaved mind aspiring to freedom...If true, it meant Cinque was one more victim turned unthinking killer, accepting the killer's definition of freedom as domination over others. Either slave or slaveddealer. The narrow vision irked her, the crude dialectical approach, the reduction of life's options into polar choices, leaving the creative arcs of non-exploitative possibility unspoken, unknown, ultimately unknowable.(88)

Cinque's death-dealing logic is in keeping with his status as the false prophet who enters the 'sacred' *polis* of Bara expecting acknowledgement and consecration, only to be unmasked by Tete, a different type of Tiresias, who sees through him. Like the power-

hungry Mass Levi in *Mya*, Cinque too is brought down to earth by a woman gifted with other senses. Modelled after the famed rebellious slave Cinque of the *Amistad* ship revolt, Armah's Cinque resents having been enslaved, but later decides slavery is a lucrative venture he wants a piece of. By contrast, Ast's role, in cosmic terms, is essentially to reverse the wheel of destiny and rewrite the scenario of inevitability foreign cultures have scripted for the Black subjectivity. It is in this capacity that she will not only survive the murdered Asar, but will be the bearer of the infant Horus. Like Isis, she should in subsequent works by Armah turn dismemberment into re-membering, grief into triumph, despair into hope. She, thus, embodies the possibility of an alternative structure of being outside the temporal homogeneity of Western historicism as it applies to Blackness and what it denotes.

In his own Christian-Pagan, Moran Bay –Grove Town binarism, the Reverend William Brassington is essentially a believer in this reading of the destiny of Black people. And in Toomer's "Kabnis," Father John provides a Black American spin on Ole African's "The half has never been told " by pointing to the constructedness of the Bible: "the sin th white folks 'mitted when they made th Bible lie"(115). Somewhat like Brodber's native and psychic characters, Father John thus registers a differential deconstruction of biblical textual ideology. *A propos* of literary deconstruction, art's ability to undermine received assumptions is vividly attested to in the long exchange between Ast and the artist Bailey:

"And you? Apart from Tumbo, what's your art about right now?"

"Been doing paintings. I have this secret dream:one day people will look at them and see the meaning of life in Africa."

"Why secret?"

"I know they reflect our diasporan confusion."

"Do you see diasporan life as separate from African life?" Ast asked.

"In theory, no. In practice, the connection between Africa and the diaspora is rough. I traveled through Liberia getting here. [I'm looking for connections and] thinking. An artist is trained to stare at truth. I'm an artist, but I blinked....Now I still paint, but something's gone. I used to tap an inner beauty lying just beneath the surface of everything I saw to paint. "....

"Pity you found no balm here."...

"What you call balm...I've found plenty of here. The place, the people. But it's buried under such powerful poison." (129-130)

In order for Bailey to begin to have a longer, more ancient perspective on his shaky sense of identity, he needed to raise his understanding of history beyond the purview of prevailing ideas; and a stay in Africa gives him the chance to get a more nuanced understanding of Black African and Egyptian philosophy:

No one told me Africans dug social change. Just that old traditionalist jive. Here I found a different truth...I wasn't prepared for the Egyptian connection. I knew those cats were into pyramids and sphinxes, but until I came to Africa I'd never heard them connected with real people and social change. I thought they only cared about eternity. (130-131)

Bailey's candid admission of despair is tempered by the artistic will and hope that imaginative response as social imperative can be as efficient and redemptive as any other form of action. The exchange debunks a number of perceptions regarding African and Egyptian belief-systems, such as the misperception that the concept of change is foreign to both. The view that the Egyptians were convinced they had gleaned and formulated ideal life and cosmos and that they, therefore, literally stopped being creative, is a crude interpretation, the kind of blind, imperialist, and postmodernist revenge E. San Juan, Jr. discusses, as we will see. It is more accurate to say that, they were sure that the basis of the archetypes they had formulated was sound. As I have been trying to argue, subsequent spirituality and philosophy has not proved them wrong on this score, for many of these archetypes still guide our thought-processes today. The affinity between Bailey and Ast is further reinforced in their appreciation of beginnings and of hope through their understanding and faith in the eventual triumph of painstakingly recovered memory as a form of homecoming:

Beginnings. The idea circled round in Ast's mind...Ast found herself thinking...about the essential meaning of the process unfolding around her....She was lifted beyond sadness by the thought that the fragility of beginnings did not have to mean destruction....she imagined possibilities of growing strength, of nascent power bonded with such integrity that the fear of destruction would yield to love no longer crippled by anxiety. (163)

Ast's lamenting of the faintness of the traces left by those who refused to betray their people and help write Africa out of history and memory is credible. The past two centuries have seen the systematic Western erasure of Africa and an equally methodical covering up of evidence of Western borrowings. The anticipated result is that with a restricted menu of data, memory will be confounded and induced into a nihilist death logic. In *Osiris Rising*, the power of memory, religion, mythology, and mysticism in the struggle against forgetfulness becomes what, in reference to ancient Egypt, Frances A. Yates, in *The Art of Memory*, images as "inner writing", in the sense in which the mystic art of memory intersects the horizontal flow of secular time and restores historical agency and narrative subjectivity within a fuller temporality. "Inner writing", then, is the metaphysical imaging of Ast's inner quest for a truer self. It is a dimension of the African self Yates variously refers to as "the inner wisdom which... the Egyptians lost when external writing with letters was invented" (262), "the ancient Egyptian wisdom of the...art of memory" (262), "the inner writing of occult memory" (262). Sounding the depth of such an art and the particular structure of its ontology, she notes earlier in reference to Socrates that "the memories of the most ancient Egyptians are those of truly wise men in contact with the realities. The ancient Egyptian practice of the memory is represented as "a most profound discipline" (53). And the issue of "inner writing," briefly brings us to the question of poetry and ontology; where poetry seeks to approximate authentic knowledge and self-apprehension more closely than other art-forms do. The poems in Soyinka's *Poems of Black Africa* and how they are thematically subdivided help us briefly address this issue. In "Mandela's Sermon" (204), even Keorapetse Kgotsile, whose poetic world is often very socio-political, has an ontological point to make as he bemoans an attrition of consciousness brought on by an alien encounter, made more unbearable by the inhumanity of apartheid:

False gods killed the poet in me. Now
 I dig graves
 With artistic precision

Still, bitterness at modernity's truncation of one's sense of self (its enervation of ethnic self-confidence) does not exempt Kgositsile from the artistic obligation to keep searching for new imaginative space; not if Birago Diop's injunction is anything to go by. Diop's most memorable poems are firmly tethered to an indigenous, Black African, animistic world of spirits and ancestors; well moored to a world that intersects and complements the modern, as in "Vanity" (46-47):

What heart will listen to our clamouring?
 What ear to our pitiful anger
 Which grows in us like a tumour
 In the black depth of our plaintive throats?
 When our Dead come with their Dead
 When they have spoken to us with their clumsy voices;
 Just our ears were deaf

To their cries, to their wild appeals
 Just as our ears were deaf
 They have left on the earth their cries,
 In the air, on the water, where they have traced their signs
 For us, blind deaf and unworthy Sons
 Who see nothing of what they have made
 In the air, on the water, where they have traced their signs.

On the issue of Western erasures and occlusions, Harris's above-mentioned essay on Soyinka indicates a frontier beyond which Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is unable to go; a stereotypical image of Africa the novel is, all in all, too Eurocentrically conditioned to rise above. *Osiris Rising's* intertextual engagement of Conrad through its reference to "the heart of African darkness" (173) is, therefore, noteworthy. The reason is that this view of Africa forms the basis on which Captain Broderick Petty concludes that a logos as central to Christianity as the ankh cannot possibly be of African origin. Petty's ventriloquist report on African "savagery" is also the kind of questionable data on which Hegel based his idea of Africa, as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's *Race and the Enlightenment* shows. *Myal's* brief but effective rewriting of the history of Christianity in

the narrator's reference to Joseph in and out of Egypt falls within the same problematics of erasures and traces. For the novel repeatedly refers to Christianity, only as a way of 'signifying' (Gates) upon it; as a strategy of mentioning it in order to 'contaminate' it with Blackness and rewrite it. *Myal* too engages and reverses Judeo-Christian and European realism on Africa and the Black world by resorting to a telepathic register to feature this revisionist move. As we will see, such a thematisation of other ways of knowing is indispensable to the signifying system of Brodber's resourceful novel; important to its identity as a literary and phenomenological text. And when Ast and Asar, riding a boat, plunge into a pristine forest in a symbolic journey back in time, they are not bound for a Conradian "horror," but impelled by an irresistible attraction to ancient truths:

Now the river lay through forest. Occasional gaps showed among the trees, but the soil was not visible. Near the banks, thick vegetation obscured tree trunks. At water level the leaves were sprinkled with wild flowers, mostly pale purple.

Ast steered the boat a while, to wake her senses up and give Asar time to sleep. But he was far from sleepy, and when he didn't have the boat to steer, he merely grew fidgety and ill at ease, as if for him too this was a voyage into unfamiliar waters.

Ahead on the west bank, a small sandstone cliff pushed into the river, its raw side so red it seemed to have been cut off its parent mass the day before. The boat turned right, going round the cliff. As it straightened out after the bend, Asar leaned back in his seat, all tension gone. Bara had swung into view.

The first sign of the town was its waterfall. It was not high, but it was spectacularly broad. A third of the way across it from the west bank hung a steep cliff below which water had eroded the rock, creating a foaming cascade. It made a distant, steady sound, like early morning drizzle amplified. (247)

As we will see shortly, everything about Bara and its inhabitants converges toward the maturation of Asar and Ast. The custodians of collective memory at Bara reveal some uncomfortable truths about the past, but these only sharpen Asar's sense of objectivity, away from facile idealisation. In this sense, what Asar learns about some of his ancestors and Ast's encounter with the ankh are epiphanies of the modern self. It is significant that Tete's grandmother was thought insane by some in the past for having dared to be different. Also, Cinque calls Tete a "crazy subversive" (269) for disputing his claim to royal descent. When Tete herself tells us "I feel nine thousand years old" (249),

we are reminded of another ancient and 'troublesome' woman: William Brassington's "crazy woman" Miss Gatha. The centrality of female 'eccentricity' to *Myal* is worth emphasising. In his essay "The Life of Myth and its Possible Bearing on Erna Brodber's Fictions *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal*," featured in Jeanne Armstrong's *Demythologising the Romance of Conquest*, Wilson Harris speculates that "*Myal* best embodies perhaps an intuitive leap or conversion of boundaries in Miss Gatha." Harris is right in at least one sense. For, there are indeed two formidable oppositional regimes or modes of cognition in *Myal* – Christology on the one hand, and dance and telepathy on the other. Dance in *Myal* is not a succession of meaninglessly choreographed steps and moves, for Miss Gatha and her initiates know what the drums are really saying and exactly what the moves denote. For example, in his review of *Myal* in an issue of *Jamaica Journal*, Michael G. Cooke highlights the original spiritual and anti-colonial goals of the myalist belief-system:

a. centred on a dance called *cumina* and on spirit possession. b. associated with visions and authorized at once by the gods and the ancestors (whom the individual in possession is seen to personify in particular guises), c. dedicated to curing individual afflictions in the context of family and community values while at the same time, d. oriented toward a millenarian view of life.....[In short], 'doing God's work, and....trying to put right a 'contrary world'. (57)

In Soyinkan and Nietzschean terms, Miss Gatha's "archetypal steps" (Soyinka) are an expression of a metaphysical and poetic resistance to forces inimical to Afro-Caribbean and female identitarian assertion. The enigma that is Miss Gatha cannot be adequately conveyed in writing; neither can it be grasped in the inept register of William Brassington's Christian discourse. Like Achebe's Ezeulu, Miss Agatha Paisley (Gatha) is both knowable and unknowable.

Within the dialectical movement of (oppositional) cultural codes in *Myal* (a dialectics which will produce the 'hybrid' Maydene), it is important to understand the symbolism of African dance as retained and practised in the Americas. In Brodber's

artistic mediation of codes and values, William Brassington, like some of Amiri Baraka's unsavoury Black clergymen, is another oppressive force (and an openly contemptuous one) who reminds one of the horrors of the Middle Passage and of the inhumanity of the harsh plantation system in the Americas. As a non-linguistic challenge to William Brassington and other "thieves of the spirit", Miss Gatha's (and her community's) ritual dance is a form of resistance and spirituality which inscribes in space the cryptic language of ethnic spirituality. The body becomes memory and textualises a particular form of spirituality that evokes a distinct spiritual view of the world. Because it is cosmic rhythm made observable, Miss Gatha's spatial 'text' epistemologically constitutes a form of consciousness within which the two temporalities of the past (Africa) and the present (the Caribbean communities) are also made manifest. Against the 'monology' of William Brassington's Christian perspective, the restoration of the brutalised and zombified racial and gendered body is epistemologically enabled by the fusion, through a bodily tropology, of symbol and substance to bring about an essential oneness of outlook. Dance and music unfold and achieve their own momentum and consistency and, thus, can be said to have their own consciousness that theory must more systematically explore. The essentially spiritual art-form Miss Gatha inscribes also makes her (in telepathic communion with a spiritually troubled young lady) a subjectivity transmuted through ritual possession:

Then came the drums....bum-batti-bum-battie-bum-battie-bum....Now the [music] was deafening....The drumming, the singing and groaning continued straight through the nightfall....But what to do when the child's face changed to that of an old woman and she began in her stupor to moan and groan like Miss Gatha and her companions at the tabernacle? Where Miss Gatha herself had fallen on the ground....where she was thrashing, boxing and kicking and screaming what seemed like "Let me go"; where her face changed to that of a beautiful fifteen-year-old and back again to that of Miss Gatha's sixty odd years and back again and back again and back again until she was silent, her limbs quiet and she was fifteen years old. (71-73, *passim*)

Through ritual transubstantiation Miss Gatha's body becomes the embodiment or vector of a different cognitive value, a phenomenological and aesthetic expression which

fissures the homogenising rhythm of Brassington's Christology. Further, like Toomer's Barlo who could hear other voices and feel the hyper-reality of other forces, Miss Gatha is not just possessed; she is also inspired and prescient, as will become clear when the restoration and alignment of physical and cosmic balance occurs through an intervention of the mystical and occult in quotidian and human affairs.

While *Osiris Rising* engages the problematic relation of signifying systems by shifting between different registers of awareness and enunciation in the form of a gradual mystical (and intellectual) epiphany for Ast, and of transubstantiation through self-sacrifice in Asar's case, *Myal* seems to prioritise a more spiralling ritualisation of narrative language to suggest the gradual heightening of consciousness. Because *Myal* and *Cane* are more profoundly and more consistently traversed by the unsettling impulse of an unconscious desire for what is essentially an ethnic metaphysical plenitude, their texture gives a much more tactile sense of plottedness than does that of *Osiris Rising*. Yet, the discontinuous plotting of their formal structure does not at all suggest meaninglessness, or even a pointless deferment of meaning, a gratuitous narrative acrobatics. Instead, it is the deployment of a particular kind of irony: the exposure of the artifice of the dominant discourses that have consistently thematised Blackness as deficiency or absence. Narrative design in *Myal* is intended to reshape our understanding of the complexity of a Black identitarian surplus as it gradually emerges through a phenomenology of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity: the phenomenological or latent and untold dimension of the self enunciated by Ole African's cryptic and ubiquitous observation that "The half has never been told" (40).

Myal's evocation of Blackness in the tapestry of Jamaican society aims at exploring the psychic, spiritual, and even intellectual resources of the Afro-Caribbean person as these help mould the future. The textuality of *Myal* is mostly the projection of this sense of ethnic depth, an enigma which undermines the effectiveness of such varied

entities or discourses as William Brassington, European modernity, and realist figuration, as these have been applied to Blackness. The manifest text of the image of Blackness as represented in colonial discourse in *Myal* is called into question by the latent text of what Harris refers to in the above-mentioned essay as "the ...force of a train of imageries" (90). These ethnic psychic structures translate into and enter the textual dynamics of *Myal*. *Myal* turns inside out the nature and function of language, and the gradual unfolding or unveiling of the true meaning of the Word for Ella is conveyed through a series of narrative detours and postponements. Far from projecting an uncertainty of perspective, *Myal* 'perverts' the 'realist' modes of signification of discourses on Blackness and Africa by undermining their aspiration to universalise themselves as unifying signifying systems.

The telepathic exchange between Dan and Willie (65-68) is an eruption, a fissuring of the realist linearity of William Brassington's perspective on Blackness. It conveys, appropriately in a different register, the gist of how to stop those who "split man from his self" (67). The essence of this mystical mode of cognition is that Afro-Caribbean consciousness must be reawakened, and that this will happen through an inner quest, as in Ast's case, in the course of which the history of the divine/mystical Word must be reconstructed and recovered. During this process, the nature and function of the deceptive, secular word, its constructedness, must be well understood, especially by Ella. Like *Osiris Rising* and *Cane*, *Myal* takes on the sense-making claims of Judeo-Christian and Western discourses through an intertextual parodying reversal of their legitimising perspectives on plot. Thus the theme of spirit-thievery in Brodber's novel must be linked with the Egypt motif in chapter ten and the stealing of Black culture. "Hoodoo men, voodoo men gave them our sound" (66) has to do with what is believed to be the ultimate Black African origin of Egyptian religion and philosophy which inspired the Abrahamic religions. This motif must itself be linked with George James's *Stolen*

Legacy (1954), a book about how Western philosophy is a legacy taken from Africa. The Caribbean James taught Greek philosophy at Arkansas A&M University. Like much of minority or Western revisionist Egyptology which contests the West's version of the history of religion and philosophy, *Stolen Legacy* is now, for better or worse, a classic in Black Egyptology, a useful starting-point. It is a fundamental text, especially in the Afrocentric Black community.¹

Dreams, possessions, the almost consistent presence of ritual music in the background, neologism, and other forms of archaism, serve to undermine and invert the disguised or unconscious death-instinct driving narrative discourses and aesthetic theories which have sought to represent the racial Other. The sound of pagan music from Grove Town trailing to Morant Bay and intruding on William Brassington's consciousness is reminiscent of the church-bell tolling in the distance but gradually approaching Ezeulu's compound in Achebe's *Arrow of God*; except that here the scenario or direction is reversed. When Maydene finally tells William of her eye-opening experience at Miss Gatha's tabernacle and announces the team (of healers) of which she is a member, true to type, William, the confident 'psychiatrist', thinks he has on his hands a wife who has lost her mind dabbling in mumbo jumbo. He fails to appreciate the extent to which pagan reality has successfully encroached on and undermined his mission to "exorcise and replace ", how it has made a convert right within his own household (88). It is a case of the teller (Maydene) and the told (her new identity) coming together; a reconfiguration of reality alien to William's signifying system, a convergence of the signifier and the signified in a kind of dénouement.

Myal interrogates the legitimacy of discourses on Blackness and reclaims a site of free agency necessary to resist assimilation and obliteration. It does this partly through a cannibalisation of the Western literary canon of texts and characters: the Bible, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Animal Farm* (105), Peter Pan (11, 80), etc. *Myal* engages

these texts to show how they negatively condition its characters' self-esteem. Further, the novel incorporates and redeploys these images of whiteness in its own textual strategy, in the sense that it debunks their status by playing up their barely visible impartiality and their constructedness. The instances of narrative tumescence that impede a linear forward movement are a figuration of the eruption of the psychic and the unconscious as they enact a groping for the plenitude of an ethnic ontology. These narrative detours, the spiralling dance of language and images, enact a choreographing of the movement of consciousness, and of the passive historical agency recovering from inertia to actively refigure itself in order to right the cosmic anomaly symbolised by the upside down "bottom up" cross (ankh) Ole African left hanging at Anita's door. Finally, another deftness of Brodber's art is that her craftsmanship is up to the task of capturing *le frisson du mystère* (Blachère) and palpably conveying it to the reader. There is an eeriness about Miss Gatha's ritual possession, about what happens between water mother's "It is finished," (73) and Reverend Simpson's own "It is finished," (75) and Anita's 'release' or de-zombification in-between.

Similarly, *Cane*'s revisionist encoding of Black subjectivity is fundamentally mystical and religious, though it lacks the intimate knowledge of the mystery of authentically Black signs Armah and Brodber bring to bear on their respective fictional representation of other worlds. Hence the need, for my Pan-African approach, to highlight the African connection of the Harlem Renaissance as identified by Angela Davis above. Because *Cane* does not point to its own linguistic condition in the same way as do *Osiris Rising* and *Myal*, plot relates to story in Toomer's novel in a mode akin to oratorical, bardic prose and to the stream-of-consciousness. Toomer's is a particular blend of idiolect and vernacular, of individual and collective inflections. At the inception of the Harlem Renaissance, Toomer produced a novel whose sheer lyrical power remains rare in Black literature. Even here, the Black novel parodies the 'realism' of

Western discourse's engagement of Blackness to cast doubt on its poetics of Otherness and to suggest its reductive figuration of Black fictional subjectivity and historical agency. The novel achieves this not only by primarily mining rural culture for poetic elements, but also with intermittent evocations of a residual ancient African subjectivity. Such is the case in the likening of Carma's body (like Miss Gatha's) to a dancing [African] forest (10) and the adjacent metaphoric connotations Toomer offers. *Cane's* narrativisation of the divorce of mind from soul also suggests the possibility of resurrection that is, however, not as assertive and sanguine (though equally soulful) as in *Osiris Rising* and *Myal*. Toomer – or the narrator -- (like the prodigal intellectual and mystic Ast) proclaims in "Song of the Son": "I have in time returned to thee" (12) and, again like Ast, grounds the redemptive power of faith not exactly in Christianity, but in a mysticism that, in part, embraces African belief-systems conveyed in the ambiguous and often exotic references to juju and rituals (10) to herald a desired southern awakening. In "Carma," *Cane* suggests the prospect of finding and following the goat path to Africa (10); but this reconnection does not materialise, does not appear to have the potential to do so because of the extreme brutality of American slavery and its particularly debilitating consequences. And Barlo in 'Esther' is a possessed, inspired 'visionary' in exile, in a strange land where 'flying home' to Africa cannot really be consummated. The evocation of Barlo, like many contestatory acts in *Cane*, is preceded by a differential marker: "Then a strange thing happens" (20). Barlo erupts into the homogenising discourse of racist oppression; and, as "a vagrant, usurping fellow" (21), he intrudes into and undermines the intents of organised religion – symbolised by those, like William Brassington, who want monopoly on the exegesis of the Word and the Black person's place in it. The minority status of Blacks in America and the dehumanising harshness they pit themselves against, undermine Toomer's optimism. Therefore, there is a realistic tension at the core of *Cane's* otherwise engrossing lyrical flow. As a result, the

experiment of stretching the bounds of language and of sounding the mystical and symbolic depth of the magical and creative Word is dampened by a series of refractions and contradictions woven into the texture. None of it seems deceitful. Instead, Toomer's reluctance to idealise Black life in America reflects his familiarity with reality and race relations in this part of the world. His obviously limited familiarity with Africa, especially with "l'Afrique des profondeurs" (Senghor) may have blinkered him to the very real liberating potential of African continuities, and constrained him to fragmentary evocations of Africa. Some might ask how much of this contradiction, refraction, is due to confusion, despair, low self-esteem, brought on by Toomer's own biological hybridity.

² The result is that in its inconclusive conclusion, his poetics does not project enough consistency and conviction. The poor status of serious studies of Africa's contribution to civilisation in Toomer's time may have been a factor in this enervation of artistic will.

The series of vignettes that is *Cane* mirrors Toomer's way of imaging the psychic power of the Black and universal unconscious. For Toomer is indeed exploring that which is both ethnic and universal, with ethnicity as a very particular prism. *Cane's* textual desire gropes for a racial metaphysical anchor and plenitude that is unachievable in America. The observation: "When one is on the soil of one's ancestors, most anything can come to one" (17) is a truism that belies a desire to recover a self more complete than what is achievable in southern Georgia and America. This extended structure of identity (Blackness in all its phenomenological depth and its very ancient history going all the way back to Africa) was not achievable during the Harlem Renaissance; and, as St.Clair Drake, Cornel West, Wahneema Lubiano, Randall Robinson and others, have argued, it is not readily achievable even today, unless a new and consistent perspectivisation is established. We may, therefore, need to more systematically foreground the African factor in *Cane*; a factor often relativised by mainstream American and Western readings of the novel. Toomer's subtle deconstruction of the 'realism' of

white American discourse on Blackness and his hard-hitting but low-key strictures on the hold of organised religion on the rural Black psyche seem unable to make a bolder creative and intellectual leap to see that the history of the Word, of mysticism and their uses in art forms, predates Gurdjieff (Toomer's European spiritual mentor) and the American literary exemplars Toomer has been said to try to emulate. On the related issue of how the lack of genuine effort to really know Blacks beyond slavery can only result in stereotyping and confusion, which can then breed trepidation, in the story "Blood-Burning Moon," Bob Stone's tormented attempts to even begin to understand the racial Other fail:

He was going to see Louisa to-night, and love her. She was lovely—in her way. Nigger way. What way was that? Damned if he knew. Must know. He'd known her long enough to know. Was there something about niggers that you couldn't know? Listening to them at church didn't tell you anything. Looking at them didn't tell you anything. Talking to them didn't tell you anything unless it was gossip, unless they wanted to talk. Of course, about farming, and licker, and craps—but those weren't niggers. Nigger was something more. How much more? Something to be afraid of, more? Hell no.(31-32)

His insincere attempts, like William Brassington's impatience with "silly linguistic rituals", is doomed, due to the reductive terms in which their language apprehends Blackness; and there is a lot of reductiveness, misperception, and misunderstanding in all three novels being discussed in this chapter. *Cane* remains inconclusive in the special sense that out of Toomer's lack of intellectual and racial confidence, the novel lacks the quest consummation and epiphany of *Osiris Rising* and *Myal*. The intersubjectivity between rural Georgia and traditional Africa is unsettled by the constraining reality of the South. Again, Father John, Toomer's own Ole African (one of Brodber's characters), concretely formulates this inhibition that is instituted with the help of mainstream American Christianity and the Bible, with his reference to the Bible as construction, an issue which is a subtext throughout *Cane*. One of the consequences of this American perversion of the Word has been that Black Americans have been denied access to discourse, a

theme common to all three novels. Their lack of access to discourse meant absence. Now, an acceleration of the pluralisation of discourse enables them to will and write into being an identity where before only silence and erasure prevailed. *Cane* still expresses faith in the redemptive power of the psychic, occult, religious, and artistic resources of rural ethnicity, and of Black America at large. However, the artistic task of radically deconstructing and undermining the perverted Word and of proposing a viable alternative appears stymied and incomplete. To this extent, Father John's words direct attention to where the culture wars (H.L. Gates, Jr.), the contestation, must begin. (In the context of Gates's book and in that of *Cane*, "the culture wars" refers, respectively, to the Black petition that the (literary) canon and History be reviewed and revised).

Before reintroducing *Osiris Rising* to briefly suggest what *Cane* might possibly have in common with the former's African mysticism or occultism (i. e., what 'intertextual' element there might be), it is necessary to flesh out a little further how mysticism relates to personal and textual identity in Toomer. This requires an elaboration on the Gurdjieff factor briefly referred to earlier. My particular interest in this dissertation in the image of ancient Africa in Toomer's work has required that I read him slightly differently from the interpretations that have been offered. I have asked slightly different questions. I have been looking at the origin and evolution of mysticism, occultism, etc.; in short, at the things Carruthers refers to collectively as "deep thought." I want to consolidate this particular line of enquiry by looking more closely at Africa in Toomer's consciousness and, therefore, in the deep structures of his writing. In the chapter "The Years with Gurdjieff," Rudolph P. Byrd, in his *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff: Portrait of An Artist 1923-1936*, quotes Toomer as having stated: "[all] races are mixed races – and so mixed that no one can unravel them in all their blended complexity. No one knows for sure....but guesses have been made as to the strains which make up the present day peoples of Germany, of France, of England – and the layman would be surprised at the

results of such guesses. They lead back to Asia – into Africa” (54). On what irresistible urge caused the spiritually tormented Gurdjieff to leave his adopted city of Kars in Turkey and embark on a frenzied quest for meaning, Byrd tells us:

Gurdjieff's odyssey took him through much of Asia and parts of Africa, and throughout the journey he held on to two objectives. The first was to visit the libraries, temples, and monasteries of any country in which he might find himself. The second was to meet with the holy men and teachers of all faiths, as they were often living reliquaries of much of the world's esoterism. (66-67)

Later, Gurdjieff was such an influential figure in Toomer's life that he, in a way, determined the very way Toomer represented to himself how his life unfolded. According to Byrd, “Toomer divided his own life into two separate phases: “Before Being Consciousness,” the period before 1923 and the discovery of Gurdjieff, and “After Being Consciousness,” the period following it.” (2)

It is important to note that Toomer's own spiritual and intellectual dispositions to favour “deep thought” predisposed him to Gurdjieff's teachings. In other words, Gurdjieff reinforced what was already stirring in Toomer. It was Toomer's disposition and its blossoming, through awareness of Gurdjieff, which constitute the mystical foundation of *Cane*, a work in which Toomer engages the socio-spiritual problems of his generation. According to Byrd, what made the Gurdjieff experience invaluable was a curious crisis of confidence that gripped Toomer at a moment when lesser artists would have been jubilating. For as Byrd observes,

Just after Horace Liveright informed Toomer of his decision to publish *Cane*, Toomer's mood changed from elation to something approaching a depression. Toomer described his feelings at the same time: ‘During the winter of 1923, owing to a complex of causes, my writing stopped; and my disharmony became distressingly prominent. So it became clear that my literary occupations had not worked deep enough to make of me an integrated man. Had it done so for others?’ (52)

Toomer muses in an autobiography:

It was curious. To all outside appearances I was going well, if not strong. I had recently written, my publisher had just brought out my first book. Critics were praising me. I was, it seemed, one of the promising writers of the younger generation. All I had to do was to write more books. A series of works, a name,

a place. The world was before me, so it appeared. But all of this was outside. It existed in the minds of those who did not know my inner condition. To me, who knew, it was ironic and strange. That I, who had just begun as a figure in American letters, should find myself in the big blind alley of my life.

In prison. In prison on every plane and in every way of which I was sensible. Imprisoned by my ego – which is the first and last prison....Personal problems overshadowed all else....I was not a whole man. (Byrd, 52-53)

To Byrd, Toomer's crisis probably resulted from a felt disappointment with "his efforts to address, through the prism of African-American life and culture, what he had identified as the causes of the spiritual malaise of his generation" (53).

Toomer felt so keenly the realisation that a " spiritual and psychological wholeness" was eluding him, because of the premium he placed on this state-of-being and its ability to fire the most sublime of imaginations. For Toomer, Byrd reports, was not:

A man after the fashion of Hemingway, whose fiction transformed violence and toughness into a kind of brutish religion, but a man in the Gurdjieffian sense, a man whose three centers of being -- emotional, physical, and intellectual -- were not in conflict but in accord with each other and moving in concert toward the one supreme goal: higher consciousness. (63)

Toomer, it is fair to say, was searching for esoteric wisdom of the loftiest kind. The nature of his quest can, thus, be linked with the nature of what Gurdjieff was offering. Byrd notes about Gurdjieff's institute, *Le Prieuré*, near Fontainebleau, in France: "contrary to gossip....[it] was rather an institution in which individuals interested in their spiritual and psychological development were given the tools with which to build a foundation for growth"(67). And Toomer himself noted, " The Institute offered....an over-all system of training and reeducation to promote, in its words, the harmonious development of man" (Byrd, 67-68). Describing the Gurdjieff mission in terms reminiscent of Kolpakhty's take on the profound purposes of esoteric psychoanalysis, Byrd elaborates:

The Gurdjieff system does not enjoy membership in that exclusive club of psychological systems that study man as they find him or as they suppose him to be. On the contrary, Gurdjieff would regard much modern scientific psychology,

including many of the theories advanced by Freud and Jung, as fixed and limited. Gurdjieff went one step further than most psychological theorists. He proposed that man should be studied not only from the point of view of what he is or what he seems to be but also from the point of view of what he may become, that is, from the point of view of his possible evolution.

Gurdjieff argued that man as he is is not a complete being. Nature is responsible for only so much of man's development. If we wish to develop further we must do so by our own efforts. The evolution about which Gurdjieff was principally concerned was the development of certain inner qualities and features that frequently remain underdeveloped and that cannot develop by themselves. But the psychological evolution of which Gurdjieff spoke is not for everyone, for the simple reason that not everyone is interested. Those people who shun the burden of development—Gurdjieff called them tramps and lunatics—are essentially lazy. They are content to remain as they are or, as Gurdjieff was quick to point out, as nature has left them. (78-79)

Toomer did feel gratified by the Gurdjieff literature he read and the Gurdjieff spectacles he attended when the Gurdjieff 'troupe' visited New York City in January 1924. I quote Toomer's reaction to and description of the show, in order to connect it to an antecedent in time. Toomer writes:

There was no printed program. You were not given through the mind in advance the slightest [idea] of what to expect. You did not know what to call the various exercises and dances. You were in no way helped to label and classify. Not until I had seen several demonstrations did I learn that the group of exercises with which the demonstrations invariably began were called "The Obligations," and that another exercise was called "The Stop" exercise, and that one of the dances had the title "The Initiation of the Priestess."...The movements...[of] the dancers caught hold of me, fascinated me, spoke to me in a language strange to my experience but not unknown to a deeper center of my being.... Though I could have listened to it again and again, I had a sense from the very first that the music had not been composed to be listened to, but to be enacted. It was a call to action in those very moments that were being performed on the stage, or in a march of men and women towards a destiny not even foreshadowed in the ordinary world. And so it moved me. (as quoted by Byrd, 69, emphasis added)

Compare Toomer's comments to Freke's and Gandy's description, in *The Jesus Mysteries*, of "The Sacred Spectacle at Eleusis" which, I propose, was probably not alien to Gurdjieff's repertoire of ancient rites:

Each year some 30, 000 Athenian citizens embarked on a 30-kilometre barefoot pilgrimage to the sacred site of Eleusis....to celebrate the autumn Mysteries of Dionysus. For days they would have been preparing for this important religious event by fasting, offering sacrifices and under-going ritual purification. ... those about to be initiated danced along the "Sacred Way" to Eleusis, accompanied by the frenzied beat of cymbals and tambourines....At the head of the procession was carried the statue of Dionysus himself, leading them ever onwards. After ritual naked bathing in the sea and other purification ceremonies the crowd reached the great doors of the Telesterion, a huge

purpose-built initiation hall. Only the chosen few who were already initiated or about to be initiated into the secret Mysteries could enter here.

What awesome ceremony was held behind these closed doors that touched the great philosophers, artists, statesmen and scientists of the ancient world so deeply? All initiates were sworn to secrecy and held the Mysteries so sacred that they kept this oath. From large numbers of hints and clues, however, we know that they witnessed a sublime theatrical spectacle. They were awed by sounds and dazzled by lights. They were bathed in the blaze of a huge fire and trembled to the nerve-shattering reverberations of a mighty gong. The Hierophant, the high priest of the Mysteries, was quite literally a 'showman' who orchestrated a terrifyingly transformative dramatic reenactment of sacred myth. He himself was dressed as the central character – the godman Dionysus. (23)

And there are more ancient and African connections. Byrd expresses an African idea of surrealism when, in his own description of the effect of the Gurdjieff spectacle on Toomer, he points out: "The essential aim of this exercise was to break up what Toomer called our "circle of automaticity," for by holding postures that are not habitual we experience new ways of thinking and seeing and invite new mental associations" (70). Not surprisingly, Toomer, like Ast in her encounter with the ankh at Bara (as we will see in a moment), feels he has been here before, and that he is ready to dedicate himself to loftier purposes:

Each thing that was done was part of a whole. The exercises, the dances, the music, the ideas, each in their different ways said essentially the same thing. Each through different approaches, impressed the same message on the heart. All together they evoked a life and a world that seemed utterly native to me. Here, without doubt, was a religion of training. Here was a discipline, an invitation to conscious experiment, a flexible and complete system, a life and a way to which I felt I could dedicate my whole mind and heart and body and strength. (as quoted by Byrd, 71, emphasis added)

It is very important to note the reason Byrd gives for the Black public's failure to quickly relate to Toomer's teaching of Gurdjieff in Harlem later in his life. To Byrd: "Aside from [Aaron] Douglas, who remained interested in Gurdjieff's theories for many years, [Langston] Hughes remembered that Toomer did not win many converts in Harlem, since few people there had the leisure and resources for such activities" (78). The interest was not completely lacking; it was just that pressing economic reality and other priorities relativised it. As we will see, Claudia Tate attributes the absence of a

stronger Black interest in psychoanalysis in literature partly to essentially the same factor.

The similarity between the isolated community of inspired individuals in *Osiris Rising* and *Myal's* rather reclusive community of a particular kind of observers of their fellow humans goes further: Tete, like Ole African and Miss Gatha, is ethnic memory incarnated. And memory, the will, and faith, are imaged and mediated in a variety of ways in the three novels. We see in the image of the rectangular building at Bara Armah's use of architectural motifs to represent space, time, faith, and the transcendent. The detailed description of the design of the road leading to Bara (247) suggests a Sun Gate to this 'sacred' *polis*. And:

Inside the compound was an open courtyard in which stood a rectangular building with a wide entrance. Once within, Ast saw it formed part of the frame for an inner compound bounded by three apartments, one directly facing the wide entrance, the other two on the sides, facing each other. In the center, under a thatched roof held up on six slender pillars, stood three stools, four chairs and a sofa around a large oval table.(251-252)

In context, the architectural design suggests an astronomical cosmology, for in their essence and function the three apartments collectively denote a mansion of eternity in their cosmic design, much like the three pyramids at Gize in Egypt. When we are told that Ast felt she "knew this place" (252), we have a confirmation or realisation of the promise in her 'out-of-body' experience in America from where she connected with other entities and temporalities. Besides, she was a daughter physically returning home (to Africa as socio-geographic reality and as symbolic matrix). The feeling confirms the reality of the forces which revealed themselves to her in dream and psychic experience and have guided her steps. Throughout *Osiris Rising*, Ast will be like Tete's grandmother who "didn't get lost in the past...entered it and came out like it was a spacious home with rooms and fields and rivers and seas and skies, endless" (255). While in the rectangular building, Ast is at first unable to find a focussing point for her past

and recent life; and this is followed by a very symbolic occurrence, leading to a kind of epiphany:

Ast opened her eyes expecting to see Asar, and found herself looking straight up at the thatch above her. In the dark cone where the roofbeams came together, there was a carved object with a familiar shape. She closed her eyes, then opened them to make sure this was not an illusion brought on by the play of shadow and light above her. The way the ankh was placed, it formed a centerpiece holding the roofbeams together. (252)

The ankh is that which focusses Ast's thoughts and faith. It is the force which, binding the roofbeams, almost literally holds the building, the 'church', together, and is at the heart of her faith. It is the main element in the overall symbolism of faith that is the building itself. For the building represents, or simply is, *per ankh*, the Egyptian for "House of Life" -- also the name of the Dakar-based publisher of *Osiris Rising*. Within this dome, a sacred geometry, Ast and everyone else (minus the impostor Cinque and his followers) can only visualise higher dimensions of experience. Therefore, when Ast says to the 'high priestess' Tete: "Not coming back...I am back", she is home, at home, in every sense of the expression; at the happy end of a quest for meaning. She has found the spiritual core of her being and intellectual thinking. Hence her elation at having found a Holy Grail, a meaning of existence, and her desire to work with it. It is an *anagnörisis*, equalled in importance only by the more explicitly Pan-African(ist) moment of intersubjective recognition when the African-American Ast tells the African Asar "Thanks for being there", and he responds "Thanks for coming "(122). By turning what must have been geometric intuition into architectural motifs to represent patterns that make faith, space, and time visible, Armah provides in this multi-dimensional novel an appropriate perspective to make the invisible visible: a mathematical, mystical, expression of how the transcendent imbricates the secular and the mundane. The technique is a doorway to another universe, a way of representing (giving structure to) abstract thought or idea, an art of memory. Ast's is, therefore, a very special case of a

daughter's return; quite unlike the kind of return Rody is interested in. The cognitive modalities *Osiris Rising* privileges make Ast a credible vector of the possibility of a twentieth- and twenty-first-century rebirth of the epic. To her request for the meaning of the ankh, Tete replies "Its meaning has to do with its history " (253). The essence of mystical perspective and of the esoteric sign of the ankh subsumes and supplements that of a secular historiographic perspective on Africa. It, thus, offers a background against which present-day secular history must be read. The liturgical emergence, fall, and rise of the ankh allegorically replicates the trajectory of the history of Black people. For according to Tete's chronicle:

The sign is well known here, though its name has changed over time and space....We know the society [of the ankh] goes back not centuries but thousands of years into the past. The pattern of its life is not an unbroken line crossing the ages. It has known weakness growing to strength, vigorous life waning to suspension. At times it died. It has known birth and death and rebirth, over and again....Because it was devoted to life, its chosen symbol was the oldest of Africa's life signs, the ankh....Through disasters and triumphs, crossing lakes and climbing mountains, in its scatterings and its reunions, our people have carried the seed of the companionship of the ankh everywhere. The unending hope of this secret society was no secret: that a time would come when this land, Africa, would again become fertile soil for the planting of that creative seed that has, in spite of all disasters, survived.(260-262 passim)

The meaning of the ankh, as fleshed out by Tete, is *Osiris Rising's* engrossing embedding of the individual and communal subjectivity unfolding anew. It is ethnic subjectivity, historical agency, and meaning finally put in perspective; very much like the kind of Black intimacy Michael G. Cooke speaks of in his *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy*, when the Black subject is at last at peace with itself.

Wilson Harris endorses neither the idea of the impossibility nor the supposed anachronism of epic in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, he formulates the issue in terms of an epistemological misunderstanding and a debasement of language in our time. He diagnoses this misperception as a crisis that is partly academicist:

Obviously epic is a misunderstood term; it is misinterpreted by the mass media which judge any large-scale Hollywood performance to be epic. Epic is *not* Hollywood *Ben-Hur* or Hollywood *Moses*. Epic is an *arrival* in an architecture of space that is *original* to our age, an *arrival* in multi-dimensionality that alerts us to some kind of transfiguration of appearances – in parallel with science and architecture – that implies energies akin to extra-human faculties inserted into the fabric of history. (187)

The meaning of Ast's epiphany at Bara lends itself to a teleological appreciation whereby her moment of arrival is the end-point of an allegory which unveiled the structure of Africa as historical consciousness and mystical Word. The embedded account of the ankh crystallises this unveiling into three moments: the Ankh is the oldest sign of life; it has been subjected –internally and externally- to countless tribulations; yet it has reemerged to be linked with twentieth- and twenty-first century ethnic rebirth.

The history of the ankh is the history of the Word. It replicates the three liturgical movements/moments of Revelation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. I am also suggesting that this structure or trajectory is applicable to Armah's œuvre and the movement through time and history of his Africa. The investment of desire as instrumentality of plot in *Osiris Rising* is toward the possession of a particular kind of body: the dismembered body of Osiris. The novel's still ongoing fictional and liturgical account of desiring and gathering the limbs of Osiris is also the psycho-historical account of rebinding the 'body' of Black consciousness.

Redemptive Tragedy

Asar (Osiris) is one of those hero-gods whose extra-human acts and sacrificial gifts enable society to regenerate. In *Osiris Rising's* particular tragic rite, the hero's journey and its purpose are not a twentieth-century anachronistic view of society. The novel is a journey into a myth of origination, and Armah's decision to revisit the birth of

tragedy in its original Osirian African context seeks to plumb the depths of modern Black consciousness at a crucial point in its history, in order to bring about the realisation of the Gnosis. In such a realisation is also the true meaning of resurrection. The urgency of an inner reawakening is aimed at circumventing a lack of depth, originality, and loftiness of purpose brought on by the superficiality and effeteness of modern metaphors and regimes of thought. *Osiris Rising's* new economy of the *grammata*, its reshuffling of narrative registers, narrativises the subject's journey from a state of induced and forced unconsciousness to one of conscious awareness that the mystery is us, within each of us, though various forces are inimical to the self's awareness of this simple truism. Hence the necessity for a truly exceptional individual to emerge, redress cosmic imbalance, enrich, and free society. Additionally, the novel explores this timeless necessity within the framework of tragedy to show the price exacted of a Promethean figure bent on improving the order he was born into; determined to lift society out of a galling slave and neo-colonial mentality. Asar is, appropriately, an enigmatic, larger-than-life figure whose innate and inflexible determination comes from the clarity of his social vision, and his conviction of its legitimacy. *Osiris Rising's* representation of the beginning of a rebirth of society consistently draws on ethics and founding ideologies that are indigenous to the two Africas (ancient and modern) it straddles. The organic, structurally well-integrated, and deftly narrated emergence and tragic end of Asar in Armah's imbrication of the mythic and mystical with the historical and modern is, thus, underpinned, as it were, by a parallel text that re-presents the history of religious wisdom and of human civilisation.

Asar is a higher type reformist and iconoclast who towers above his fellow humans. He has weighed his options, is convinced of the necessity of a new order, is not only prepared to assume his responsibility, but knows he will most probably go down in the act of doing so. He walks onto the stage, as it were, as a distinct, highly visible

character, overexposed. His tragic fate is predicted (not by an oracle, as is often the case in dramatic art) but in a dream Ast has well before she even leaves America. Asar's sacrilege is Promethean and Oedipal. He castrates the father in the sense that in virtually every sense he eclipses the local authorities and their goons, as well as the variety of foreign assistants whose task it is to ensure the survival of neocolonial structures. They see Asar as an usurper and feel threatened, though privately they do not doubt his intelligence and integrity. He does not only usurp the 'father's' authority; he also brings a particular ethnic, ordinary folk the fire of liberty. For both acts, he will be struck down. Though definitely a "strong breed" (Soyinka), unlike Soyinka's Eman in the play *The Strong Breed*, or Elesin Oba (the king's horseman) in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Asar has the distinction of not having to undergo the agony of struggling with himself before mustering the strength to accept his destiny. The nature of tragic action is two-fold in the aspect of *Osiris Rising* I am interested in here. First, there is the sacrilege of standing up to an utterly corrupt order that is being propped by unscrupulous foreign agents, both of them constituting a cabal for neo-colonial exploitation and destabilisation. Then there is the forbidden act, in a neo-colonial order, of contesting a school curriculum that is designed to ensure self-obliteration of the indigenous subjectivity and a genuflection to foreign standards of aesthetics. The benefit of the fire of freedom consists in lifting a national and racial consciousness from the hole of self-depreciation. Only a towering character can trigger a mental and cosmic revolution profound enough to start reversing this neocolonial siege to political and intellectual freedom of thought. What the neocolonial and corrupt local orders see as essentially a favour to be granted at a time they find convenient, the Promethean Asar sees as a right society is entitled to right now: an Oedipal throwing off of paternal order and authority.

Armah's modern tragedy thus conforms to dramatic and ritual theory of an exceptional individual emerging periodically to breach the forbidden in order for society

to be regenerated. The literal and figurative sterility of a defective order is consistently contrasted with the mystical and intellectual resourcefulness, as well as the serene boldness, of the hero-god. After various attempts to frame Asar do not quite succeed, the cabal trumps up charges implicating him in an assassination attempt. In the dramatic terms of the tragedy's inner logic, the powers that be are framing Asar for the additional taboos of patricide, and of fratricide (the 'collateral damage' that would have almost certainly resulted from the assassination). It is a ruse that helps a corrupt order justify an exaction of retribution. Again, Asar does not really experience the torment of a gradual transcendence to bring him to accept his Promethean role. He just assumes it. It is an attitude which baffles even Ast. Yet, again, though utterly fearless and unassuming, Asar is fully aware of the enormity of the weight of human folly and sin he is called upon to shoulder. He accepts this sacrificial role with the enigmatic serenity that befits a hero-god.

At the moment of death, the sacrificial body is transubstantiated into a water-treading god who becomes a cosmic bridge between humans and the gods, and is reintegrated into the cosmos:

The world around Ast turned ashen. She heard a metallic shutter, then a scream of bullets close to her seeking the single target. Between the two boats the paths traced by burning metal looked like a mesmerizing night photograph of a city [; like the Milky Way].

She saw Asar raise his arms to cup his hands round his mouth; to repeat his query. The first bullet struck, giving him no time to register surprise. His body pivoted left. Other bullets reversed it. For a moment he stood suspended, like a figure treading water. It seemed the ceaseless bullets would turn him round again, but they only immobilised him on a stuttering vertical axis. Under relentless fire the perforated target bent over, then was literally torn apart by an explosion stronger than all the jets of bullets on fire.

Ast saw Asar totter upright in a flash, arms still in the communicant attitude of his last question. Then he exploded silently into fourteen starry fragments, and the pieces plunged into the peaceful water.(305)

Armah's aesthetics of martyrdom or sainthood and what reads like his cinematic technique of slow-motion fixate the reader on Asar's symbolic death. Within the space and narrative time of the novel, we see the narrativisation of the historical and liturgical

sacrificial body of Africa. In liturgical terms, Asar's act means that from the maw of the absolutist sign of neocolonialism and local despotism miraculously comes the redemptive gift of a 'Eucharistic' Sign as nourishment to fill a void in the lives of those in need of determination and faith in a better future. In Asar we have *Osiris Rising's* distribution of a twofold body (the historical body imbricating the mystico-liturgical one) as a way of overcoming the schism of anteriority and futurity. It is the representation of Africa's body and consciousness in the necessary continuum of two historicities, but as a binding: *ligere*; or, more precisely, as a binding back: *re-ligere*. Asar (Osiris) dies to redeem society and culture. At the same time, he is resurrected in the novel's immortalising retelling of his story at a crucial time in the history of Black people. Better still, there is hope in Ast being pregnant with Horus. The culture-bearing potential of Asar's transgression of the limitations imposed on the full capacity of Black creative imagination lies in the immortalisation of the Black literary subjectivity now eschatologically represented as continuous agency. It lies in the fact that his blood and body are the realisation of the Sign of all signs, the Story of all stories. In this regard, Armah's decision to give each chapter of his novel an ancient Egyptian name does not go unnoticed. As elements of lexicology in historical linguistics, they are not gratuitous and eccentric narrative elements. Philosophically, the device is a way of framing present-day Africa by repositioning it in the total history of time. It reinforces the overall objective of making the liturgical time of religion and mysticism co-extensive with historical time. I have translated some of the main terms/chapters:

1. Nwn (or Nun) = watery void (the beginning of Time)
2. Nwt (or Nut) = Sky
3. Rekhit
4. Set = brother of Asar
5. Asar = rendered in Greek as Osiris

6. Iarw
7. Rwwt
8. Reswt
9. Ienw
10. Jehwty (or Jehuti) = god of intelligence writing
11. Iryt
12. Dwat = the afterworld, underworld

On this particular point, Lorentzon's comments are instructive. To him,

[the terms] relate to what the chapters narrate. If this knowledge were necessary for understanding the novel, it would inscribe very few readers. But I cannot believe that Armah wrote this novel only for those knowledgeable in Ancient Egyptian; instead, I understand it as his homage to that ancient 'African' culture, and to Cheikh Anta Diop. All the Egyptian references allude to the major intertextual myth after which the novel is named. (185)

Lorentzon goes on to offer the following contribution that is worth 'upgrading' from footnote to textual element:

"Nwn" is presumably the same as Nun = primordial water of the chaos out of which the gods finally arose. In the novel it represents the chaos in the US, before Ast's decision to return to Africa. "Nwt", Nut = the sky goddess, wife of Geb and mother to Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Seth, and in the novel also the name of Ast's grandmother. Here in the second chapter Ast continues the journey Nwt began when teaching her hieroglyphs. Chapter three's "Rhekyt" = a lapwing, representing the conquered people of lower Egypt. "Set" is Osiris' [sic] slayer, and will so become also in this modern rendering of the myth. "Asar" is possibly the earliest name for Osiris, and in this, the fifth, chapter we meet this modern incarnation. "Jarw" is 'place' according to a reading interlude (p. 7), and tells of Ast's visit to Cinque's place in chapter six. "Reswt" of the eight's [sic] chapter, could possibly mean 'joy', which narrates the joyful party at Asar [sic]. Also chapter ten's "Jehwty" is translated as 'the divine writer' (p. 8), and it presumably refers to Ama Tete of the chapter. "Iryt" = 'produce' or 'crop'. And "Dwat", Dat is the netherworld that Asar enters in this last chapter. (185)

The capacity of mythic archetypes (and mysticism) to powerfully stir the subconscious/unconscious and impel it to lofty (or horrific) deeds still remains a mystery to a significant degree. While a complete understanding of this dynamics still eludes critical theory, the effect of myth on human conduct is palpable, since it is the essence or inspiration of the great religious and folkloric stories known as foundational texts. These

texts are often the bedrock of human projects and hopes. Such, for example, is the interpenetration of mystical experience and artistic creativity. Armah the hierophant revisits the mystery of the Sign and immortalises the Black narrative subjectivity through an exegesis of a trinity of archetypal symbols: the ankh (life), Theuth (mystical or divine writing), and Nwn (endless potentiality). *Osiris Rising's* hierophany casts the trinity of Asar (Osiris), Ast (Isis), and Tete in a story through which Ra's divine Word wills and speaks into being a new African subjectivity which outwits the positivism and totalising authoritativeness of Judeo-Christian and Euro-Western inventions of the destiny of Black people. The eternal space beneath *Osiris Rising's* signs undermines and calls into question the Africa enunciated in the spatialised binary representation of Blackness in the West's constitution of the racial Other. Toomer, Brodber, and Armah are able to educate their readers about a crisis of perception that is the legacy of modernist determinism. They make radical shifts in narrative composition where the power of the imagination crosses various frontiers and realms that were thought to be of no relevance, or forbiddingly off-limits, to Black fictional truth. As we will see, this realisation motivates Claudia Tate to reinstate psychoanalysis in Black critical theory. In Armah's novel, the transcendental power of myth and its literary projection is sustained by a wellspring of ethnic ethos which, in their fundamentally optimistic outlook, feed into the transformative power of artistic creativity.

In Armah's oeuvre, *Osiris Rising* distinguishes itself through a process of individuation achieved mainly by a thorough ingestion of a mythical paradigm into its cosmology and texture. The novel's Pan-African visionary faith is more audacious and confident than what obtains in the herculean but deftly executed task *Cane* sets itself. For, though Toomer identifies correctly the deep yearnings and profound humanity of his Black characters, in projecting the redemptive potential of such yearnings, Toomer appears hampered by a fundamental irresolution of artistic will that seems unable to

offer a better future in concrete terms. Toomer's novel taps into spiritual depth, while at the same time it catches the bleak mood created by vicious racism. Still, in *Cane*, *Osiris Rising*, and *Myal*, we have three cosmologies in which the spiritual and the timeless intersect the quotidian to recreate humanity and the universe.

The ethnic intersubjectivity subverts the binary logic of modernism. Yet, the discontinuous and densely aphoristic textuality of *Myal* cannot be mistaken for postmodernist fiction. To do so would be to delude oneself with the misguided liberalism that would have us believe that Brodber is primarily interested in an endless refraction and deferment of ethnic assertion. In the three novels, we have three varying degrees of an imaginative rebirth of Africa and people of African descent mediated, in *Osiris Rising*'s 'dialogue' with *Cane*, through the significance of Ast's ability to find the "goat path" back to Africa. The degrees vary, since in *Cane* a particularly rich and intense form of ethnicity is actually disappearing.

Through an aesthetic displacement of the commonplace, Armah, Toomer, and Brodber are able to alert their readers to a crisis in self-knowledge, to the difficulty or inability in modern times to see the other dimension of Black identitarian affirmation. The rethinking of the genesis of the novel that this shift of imaginative emphasis suggests is itself conducive to a reinvention of the Black novel. *Osiris Rising*'s displacement and projection of myth is able to remain both detached and concerned, straddling the ideological and the imaginary, thus dramatising the possible power of alternative modes and currents of novelistic practice. That which is positively rural and folkloric in *Cane* and *Myal* is, as it were, mystically and intellectually textured in *Osiris Rising*. In so doing, Armah's novel provides additional historical depth indispensable to the work of literary theory. By taking off, as it were, from where works by Soyinka, Morrison, and others make only brief references to the plausibility of the Black Egypt

thesis, *Osiris Rising* more organically extends the expressive range of the African and Black novel(s).

A Black hermeneutic tradition which narrows the gap between narrative aesthetics and epistemology, and between poetic enunciation and ontology, does away with the urge for a reified self-referential ideality. Armah's move to recover or revisit the epic in a late twentieth-century novel is motivated by a desire to redeploy the organic unity of history and fictional truth. It is a significant narrative move from his earlier novels. It confirms Wilson Harris's injunction that the epic be made an indispensable part of the reinvention of the novel. What the epic dimension of Armah's novel offers a faltering Black literary theory, then, is the assurance and confidence that it has a choice. It does not have to go along with a gratuitous textualist collapsing of Black history into an aestheticism which sees any onto-epistemological, essentialist, or mimetic affirmation as anathema. Armah's resort to mysticism and the epic as the imaginary apparatus within which modern African history is imaged, helps him register an epistemological distance and break from Western versions of African history, for it privileges, suggests, a mystical mode of historical understanding whereby the Black subject grasps together, almost as an epiphany, the loose, disseminated, elided threads of its historical agency, as against the sequential, processual linearity of a colonial version. In short, narrative in the novel achieves an epistemological status as knowledge of the self and of the dynamics of authentic historical understanding.

On the question of the 'incommensurability' of ethnic and essentialist literature with the 'sophistication' of postmodernism, in *Deliberate Criticism: Toward a Postmodern Humanism*, Stephen R. Yarbrough writes:

The present crisis calls for a recovery of the sense of the common, which is at the same time a rediscovery of grace, a rediscovery of propriety, a rediscovery of the possibility of discovery. Indeed, postmodernism can be defined in terms of an intense awareness of the present-day incapacity to discover, and postmodern humanism can be distinguished from postmodernism in general by the fact that it

takes this incapacity as a problem, as a failure of thought and not a glorious path to "freedom"....There are two ways to look at the death of great art—the art that provides 'a solidly grounded articulated position in the midst of beings....' On the one hand the world has grown old and too solidly established. It has been articulated too often and from too many points of view for any new work of art to be granted its originality and be understood as more than a rearticulation of an older work. It is in this sense that literature is exhausted and that reading is always a rereading—at its best, a strong misreading of the past. On the other hand, a humanist postmodern age must insist that literature cannot simply look for newer and cleverer ways to deviate from the past. (35-36)

Osiris Rising belongs in this humanist tradition. It is the first novel in Black literature to have thematised alternative, humanist, historical understanding so radically, yet so aesthetically inspiring. Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* favours a good amount of relativisation while still remaining grounded in ethnic consciousness. One gets a sense of this complexity of Reed's fictional truth in this experimental novel and of his personal socio-political points of view in the introductory section of Dick's and Singh's collection of conversations with Reed:

Black nationalists, English professors, feminists, liberals, conservatives and other assorted groups have often missed the many compelling ironies that mark the personalities and careers of Reed's personae and protagonists, who have, in turn, been viewed in narrowly racial, biographical or ideological terms. Understanding Reed's "writin' is fightin'" spirit has been complicated by the challenges of his literary innovation and his "hoodoo" aesthetic, which 'draws from other arts, like music, painting, film—out of my experience and Afro-American folklore.' A novel such as *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), for example, makes special demands on readers with its combination of satire and parody, comedy and fantasy, African and African American religion, as well as myth, history, film and other forms of popular culture....Reed is often in conflict with a culture that shows a strong tendency to strap its artists and intellectuals with worn-out clichés and labels. As a writer who has experimented in many forms and genres and chosen postmodernism over protest and naturalism, Reed defies popular academic conceptions of what American writers, particularly black American male writers, ought to be. (IX)

Yet the very first statement of this introductory piece can be construed as firmly grounded in painful socio-historical reality. It is a statement Reed had made to Judith Moore in 1983: "I'm from Tennessee. My ancestors always spoke up. So I'm speakin' up (IX). Armah, by contrast, prefers to unlock the unconscious to consolidate the past, as I will show when I discuss how the Egyptologist turn in the African and Black novel(s)

can be said to make it easier to see what theory in general, but Hegelian philosophy and Derridean deconstruction specifically, owe Africa.

IV. The Future of Black Literary Theory

Satya P. Mohanty's pointers and optimism notwithstanding, postcolonial theory -- especially on Africa by many Africans and non-Africans -- has yet to effect an in-depth sounding of Black African and Black diasporic subjectivity and phenomenology. Therefore, Tom Hare's bold injunction that we thoroughly rethink minority countertheory is in part a comment on what is a certain degree of ineptitude on the part of postcolonial theory:

formerly dominant discursive regimes, both formal and ideological, have been weakened in the past decades, and the linear and positivistic presumptions of earlier generations are no longer part of the standard "tool kit" one brings to literary critical endeavors.

Yet the most challenging critical discussions of poststructuralism have remained predominantly Eurocentric and concentrated still further in a few limited areas: Rousseau, Freud, Marx, Heidegger, Romantics, some figures of the Enlightenment, sometimes Plato or the Pre-Socratics. The discourses in opposition to this heavily Eurocentric "Western" intellectual diet, on the other hand, though revolutionary in their attempt to articulate the voices of women, the subaltern, and the disenfranchised, remain in the majority of cases, engaged on the past century or two, and on languages still spoken or written today. And if some of the work following these trajectories has been insightful and important, nonetheless, our awareness of the blindnesses that go hand in hand with such insights, of the impossibility of a definitive view, of the fluidity of "the" canon -- of any canon -- these preoccupations redirect my view to the ancient and faraway, the "non-Western," the muted and the heretofore unintelligible.

The last category, the heretofore unintelligible, is of privileged epistemological focus. For although there have long been experts in the languages and discursive systems of that unintelligible, their enterprise has been institutionally, and often intellectually, contained, circumscribed by and grounded in a hierarchy that assumed, with varying degrees of subtlety, the superiority and centrality of "Western" thought, language, and civilization, of a tradition that was unquestioningly accepted as "ours."

But we can no longer take the little word "our" for granted. The illusion of an integral, rational, and progressive totality which is the legacy of "the West" has given way to more critically rigorous and contentious fields of discourse about culture, civilization, and the first person plural. Egypt holds an important place in this discussion....(2-3)

Writing in essentially the same register, E. San Juan, Jr. points her finger at postmodernism – at least the extreme, liberalist brand of it, to denounce its excessive trivialisation of minority identitarian claims; how it legitimises itself at the expense of others:

Behind postmodernist simulacrum.... lies....occidentalism's 'moribundity, its resentment, its despair, its cultural, social, political, economic and ideological bankruptcy' whereby the ruling class projects its own decay on everyone....postmodernist theory in complicity with Western rationality occludes [the West's Others]by depriving them of their history, their embeddedness in a specific sociocultural setting, in short, their integrity as humans. This is the textualizing revenge of imperial knowledge on the world that dare claim precedence over it. How can one recognize the Other not just [sic] as a distorted projection of all the negativity and lack in one's self? (212-213, passim)

The control of language and reality, and the power this confers; these are the determinants in Western theoretic practice:

The Western epistemological construction of Others in the various disciplines serves the goal of asserting its own supremacy. The modalities of the West's representation of other peoples do not furnish objective knowledge; instead they fulfill the historical agenda of confirming the ascendant identity of the British, the French, the European in general, over against non-Western/non-Christian peoples....[It is an imposition of an] imperial logos. (215-218 passim)

The issue of which culture first revealed divinity and the Word to humankind is far from settled. Prevailing orthodoxies will have to take this into account if the future of literary theory is to progress beyond the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Eurocentric, white male, bourgeois liberal, pronouncements of its current protocol. I would now like to try to sketch the contours of the future of Black literary theory.

The process of saving the Black literary text from overdetermination in mainstream theoretic and critical traditions begins with a new economy of the topoi of theoretic ontology. It begins with a rethinking of the consistency with which some regimes of theory have been unnecessarily privileged at the expense of others. Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought*, intervening from a rather different angle, is an example of such a process. Much like Hare, she reinstates, privileges, other dimensions of knowledge. With the historical and epistemological sweep of the DBSC and *Osiris*

Rising, Black literary theory may be able to stake one of its boldest claims yet. This claim has to do with the deck-clearing necessity to reexamine the modalities of Western literary theory since the latter's first contact with and earliest representations of (Black) Africa and the Black diaspora. The aesthetic and ideological swerve *Osiris Rising* executes is so bold that, more explicitly and more metafictionally than similar novels, it has the potential to inspire a new understanding or configuration of theoretic endeavour on literature. By refamiliarising itself with the African origin of a number of archetypal concepts and ideas which still constitute the wellspring of High Theory today, Black literary theory may now be in a position to more clearly distinguish between blindness (resulting from only a partial knowledge of the history of ideas and of the true meaning of archetypes) and the insight one gets from being liberated from obscurantism through opting for a very long-term perspective on the history of civilisation and a lucid understanding of the origin and meaning of the archetypes of this common world civilisation. If Black theory realises that such figures as Hegel and Derrida owe Africa a lot that both then misapplied, and that certain concepts (emotion, consciousness, etc.) have been distorted and given a negative connotation, it can confront blindness and misnomers. From here, this theoretic tradition should turn a bit more inside and appreciate more of its own talented writers. When applied to Derrida's multi-volume scholarly output, to postmodernism, and even to psychoanalysis and similar hyper-modern but flawed theories, the excessive dissemination Cheikh Anta Diop, above, associates with European methodology and Western critical theory generally, may now be grasped as a way High Theory tends to push the Black subjectivity toward obliteration. Such a (Western) method of analysis and many of the theories it engenders are, therefore, still the objects of considerable wariness in the Black theoretic tradition. High Theory has been so unhinged from the noble ideals of the pre-Greek originators of the fundamental concepts of *sophia* and *grammata* that its usefulness is being called

into question. Has High Theory become too detached to be useful? From a minority vantage point, the question is pertinent, prompted as it is by the realisation that, sensing the encroachment of minority discourses, mainstream High Theory has increasingly become ingenious in devising defensive mechanisms to keep passing itself off as orthodoxy. General literary theory that continues to see Africa and the Black world as peripheral is no longer credible, for, as we will see presently, many of the Judeo-Christian onto-epistemologic assumptions dearest to Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Euro-American critical and theoretic traditions are quickly being debunked, being put in proper perspective. As a result, Black literary theory can now more serenely envisage a future, since the recent incremental gains of revisionist theory have now garnered enough momentum to effect a true democratisation of literary theory. In the related field of historiography where a lot of ground-clearing work has been done by Black theory, Steven Feierman neatly articulates the effect of African history on the West's sense of intellectual self-sufficiency:

The story of "African history," its recent emergence as a field of scholarly knowledge, shows that the expansion of the historian's world to new subject areas cannot be pictured only as a process of addition – as the growth of a fund of knowledge. The expansion of Africanist knowledge in the years since 1960 has had a profoundly subversive effect on general historical learning. One of the first effects of the appearance of African history (and of other histories like it) in the world of established scholarship was to dissolve world history, to make it impossible to write clear and coherent narratives tying together the world's parts. But this was only the most obvious and superficial effect of the incorporation of new knowledge. Much more important has been the tension between the accustomed language in which historians construct their explanations, and the historical experience of Africans, which cannot be encompassed by that language. Because African history breaks the bounds of historical language it undermines general historical thought and, in the end, cuts beneath even its own foundations. But this is a later part of the story. (40, emphases added)

Africa's 'admission' into historical discourse does not have to mean the end of History, as Feierman suggests. I have introduced Feierman here and commented on the concern at the end of the above quotation because, as we will see shortly, the same concern or case for "the end of History" is being made by mainstream Western literary

theory. But, it is a false problem, a *faux problème*. After all, Africans did not create the prejudices and problems associated with the schools of High Theory I have been denouncing. As a result, they do not have to endorse the idea of the ultimate impossibility of a Black critical theory that Feierman implies is inevitable. Therefore, by demonstrating how flawed many mainstream Western theories are, African and Black counter-history and counter-theory are not necessarily precipitating the end of History and philosophy; they are only challenging theory to live up to truly humanist and universalist ethos. In his recent work, *The Invention of Ancient Israel, The Silencing of Palestinian History*, Keith W. Whitelam invokes Césaire to indirectly point out the link between historiography and literary theory. He then immediately goes on to say what follows about the factors which, to him, created the present-day religious and military Middle East impasse to begin with:

The attempt to provide an alternative conception of the past to that which has emerged from the discourse of biblical studies over the last century or more can only give partial voice to those populations who have been silenced by our modern studies. It is obvious that any counter-history is contingent and....[w]hat is most important ...is the exposure of the wide-ranging implications of the search for ancient Israel within nineteenth and twentieth-century biblical studies.... a deconstruction of the discourse in which the students of the [Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman West's Other] have been inducted is a necessary step: only after the nature and implications of this discourse have been exposed can the Other hope to think his/her way out of it. The problem of Palestinian history has remained unspoken ...silenced by the invention of ancient Israel in the image of the European nation state. (26)

In the particularly pertinent chapter entitled "Denying Space and Time to Palestinian History," Whitelam brings us closer to narrative theory as it applies to literature, for the passage foregrounds the set of issues which have triggered in Armah a vigilance and a boundless obsession with such apparently innocuous issues as the origin of the mystical/divine Word and the history of Time. To Whitelam:

The history of ancient Palestine has effectively been denied time of its own. Instead it is subject to the tyranny of biblical time through the periodization of the Hebrew Bible which has been an essential element of the discourse of biblical studies. The history of the region has long been seen as neatly compartmentalized into Patriarchal, Exodus, Conquest, or Settlement periods

followed by the United Monarchy of David and Solomon, the Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Exile, and then Restoration. The history of the region is, then, the history of the principal characters and events of the biblical traditions: it is the classic pursuit of the history of great men and unique events. Palestinian history is effectively silenced by this tyranny of biblical time which has been perpetuated by Western scholarship. (60-61, emphases added)

A good twenty years before Whitlam, Harvard University's Senegalese scholar, Pathé

F. Diagne, had observed about organised religion in general and similar human institutions:

le monde contemporain dominé par des conflits d'intérêts divers, matériels et immatériels, n'est pas seulement malade du capitalisme. Il n'est pas seulement porteur d'une révolution technico-instrumentale libératrice du travail et de l'aliénation matérielle des hommes dont il a du mal à accoucher. Il est également en crise du fait de la prééminence des philosophies, des systèmes d'idées, des visions et des héritages intellectuels du champ sémito-européen. Celui-ci a investi, depuis l'expansion judéo-chrétienne, islamo-arabe et euro-occidentale à peu près partout, le rapport de l'Être à Autrui, de l'Être à l'Objet, à Dieu, au Savoir, à l'Être ou au Pouvoir. L'État territoire-nation, la civilisation de l'Unique et de l'Universel réducteurs de l'autre ont meublé l'antiquité assyrienne, indo-iranienne, et leur Moyen-Âge du rêve de l'Absolu, de la guerre sainte et des Jihad. Aujourd'hui une bonne part des hégémonismes et des levers de boucliers à l'intérieur du monde capitaliste et non capitaliste, en Europe occidentale ou orientale, en Extrême-Orient et au Moyen-Orient, jusque sur le continent africain ont leur racines dans ce passé. (87-88, emphases added)

Hegel and Literary Theory: A Black Egyptologist Perspective

Unlike Whitlam, Diagne relates the danger of the historiographic ideology of all three Abrahamic faiths, and of related discourses, to Black Africa and Egypt. His "la civilisation de l'Unique et de l'Universel réducteurs de l'autre" refers, among other things, to Hegel's ontology of unity or identity; the insidious universality whose ideality can conceive of and incorporate the Other only on terms which authorise limited self-determination. As I will argue in a moment, Hegel and Hegelians have a lot to do with Black literary theory's inability to self-realise; and it may be about a Hegelian anxiety of influence which, in its desire to cover up traces of borrowings, could demand nothing less than the complete subordination of the racial Other. The intellectual interest of the

novels discussed in the previous chapter lies precisely in their new way of presenting information in a manner that guides and hones our very understanding of the properties of language and time. The novels also intimate that, if through a new philosophy of history, Black fiction itself is, consequently, inflected to accommodate a new sense of reality, narrative theory might need to be rethought. Black literary theory is thereby challenged to a relentless effort to image new knowledge of Africa's truer essence by systematising it into theoretic formulations. Various objects and archetypes in *Osiris Rising* are metaphors for ancient and more adequate ways of imaging and systematising knowledge. From their imaginative, fictional realm, they inspire critical endeavour to a deeper understanding of the symbolic language of fiction, and to a systematisation of this insight into literary theory. They prompt the literary theorist to account not only for thematics, but also to apply himself or herself to an ordering of the more intricate components of fictional narrative; and, finally, to subsume these within and comment on the philosophies and world views which form the bedrock of the particularity of Black fictional truth. For our purposes, the inscribed reader in *Osiris Rising* is the Black literary theorist. To see the issue in these terms, it is helpful to establish a correlation between the historical *amnesia* I have been discussing and the '*alexia*' of the theorist who cannot decipher the profound meanings of Black foundational texts, as Blacèhre suggests, and realise that these texts and myths have influenced Western literary theory. What is required is not only the ability to elicit from these African texts various layers of meaning, but also the commitment to argue and petition for a rethinking of the modalities of theoretic enquiry; for a change in how theoretic query is framed, the kinds of question it asks. Such an approach would enable the twenty-first century Black theorist to assess the canonic Hegel in radically different terms. For all his stricture, Ricoeur still believes in the eternal return of Hegel. Mark C. Taylor too argues the indispensability of Hegel (1), just as Fredric Jameson validates Hegel in *Marxism and Form*. Jameson lays out

the reasons for his elaborate approach in terms of the educative value of methodology.

To him, Christopher Caudwell's and Ernst Fischer's particular type of literary criticism:

may all be taken as illustrations, in their different ways, of the basic strategy, which focuses the reader's attention on the initial differentiation of art itself as it grows apart from ritual and religion and gradually establishes itself, first as a specialised body of techniques in its own right, and finally as a business, or an antibusiness, in modern times. The ideological effect of such an approach, above and beyond the anthropological facts with which it is concerned on the literal level, is to reorder our perception of the historical present, to restructure our vision of modern society in such a way that we are able to distinguish the shape of an older collective artistic practice behind the individualism of the literary and artistic present. The notion of historical evolution is thus essentially a *form* or pretext for a new politicization of our thinking, which gives us to understand what kinds of future social renewal and regeneration are available to us by allowing us a glimpse of the healthier, socially functional art of the past. (XVI)

Caudwell's and Fischer's discourses are grounded in an insistently diachronic type of literary criticism which closely correlates the claims and analyses of literary critical discourse with historical and economic evolution. Like Cornell West, Randall Robinson, and Armah, Jameson is aware of how, by nature, capitalist structures of thinking and social organisation discourage such a perspective:

Present-day Western culture, however, no longer lends itself to such a polemical restructuration. For one thing, I doubt if there are many people left who feel that there is much either in our art or in our society itself—at least in the extreme that it has reached in the United States today—which is worth salvaging in this fashion. For another, the continuity between the present and the historical and prehistoric past on which such a demonstration depended seems to have been definitively sundered by the new modes of production and organization of postindustrial capitalism. (XVI-XVII)

So far, we agree with Jameson. However, he is himself suffering from a type of political unconscious. His Eurocentrism still restricts his overall take on pre-history, for even he is unable, or unwilling, to countenance the non-Western philosophic, onto-epistemologic antecedent (Egypt) to Hegel, unlike Kolpakchty and Senghor. I have referred to Ricoeur, Taylor, and Jameson in order to introduce and critique one of the most recent endorsements of the eternal Hegel in literary theory: that of Jean-Michel Rabaté in *The Future of Theory*.

First, more on the Logos. Arguing the Black African, pre-Egyptian origin of the Logos, Senghor observes in *Ce Que Je Crois*:

Dans la philosophie africaine, [la] substance, qui se trouve sous la matière, c'est la Force. Une force qui, émanée de Dieu, *anime*, au sens étymologique du mot, toutes les apparences sensibles du monde, du cosmos, pour s'accomplir en Dieu. Aussi Dieu est-il défini comme «la Force des forces». Cette religion africaine, nul mieux que le Chrétien ne peut la comprendre: *Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.* (112-113)

Also, to Freke and Gandy in *The Jesus Mysteries*, the poetic opening of the Gospel of John is something of an enigma to the Western Christian, for "Many readers of this text find it strangely moving, but would confess to not really understanding what it means. This not surprising, because without some knowledge of Pagan philosophy [e. g., Senghor's *animisme*] it really does make little sense" (101). Like Plato, Heraclitus was steeped in the Egyptian Mysteries which had a lot to do with the Logos; and his style was, not surprisingly, often veiled and dense. The point, then, is that if without Heraclitus, there is no Hegel, and if Heraclitus is incomplete and really incomprehensible without Egyptian mysticism, then the eternal return of Hegel in literary theory is, in reality, nothing but the eternal return of the Egypt that Diop, Ricoeur, Doody, Kolpaktchy, and others argue. One is, therefore, witnessing a return of Egypt in what we might call a spiritual turn in philosophy. Again, what is not as readily obvious, because not yet rigorously theorised, is the return of Egypt in literary theory in the guise of Hegel.

Rabaté offers the reason for his championing of Hegel thus:

I still believe today that a grounding in the patient reading of Hegel (which includes at least the Preface and some key passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) is, if not a prerequisite, at least an essential step on the way to an understanding of theory. The text is difficult to be sure, but the effort of teasing out its implications and mastering its dialectical idiom affords a good starting point after which one can maneuver freely in other discourses. (21)

I have said that in Soyinka we hear echoes of "l'Afrique des profondeurs" (Senghor) and of Egypt, and I have drawn attention to Soyinka's essay "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy." Henry Louis Gates, Jr. said about

this essay essentially what Rabaté says about Hegel in 2002. To Gates in the mid 1970's in the above-mentioned interview with Soyinka, "*The Fourth Stage* is destined to mold the definitive theory of African poetics for the next generation" (50). Though Gates's assessment of the essay's potential is fair, it is also fair to say today that Black literary criticism has still not evolved a complex enough language to discuss Soyinka, let alone formulate a literary theory. Hegel is ancient Egypt via Heraclitus. However, Hegelianism was so racially biased and so narrowly blinkered by what is ultimately a Christianist ontology that History and the authentic onto-epistemology of ancient Africa were bound to outwit and outlast it. Hegelian hubris had in it the seeds of its own demise. This is partly why Cornell West refers to it as "Christology gone mad." The ability to unmask Hegel as Egypt perverted, enables the new Black theorist to quickly cut through a dilemma. It enables him or her to re-locate Hegel and see him as essentially an Egyptian problematics, while deracialising and detotalising his Herculean but flawed universalising project. Black literary theory will begin in earnest when we move from Gates's simple wish to an actual formulation of a literary metalanguage and schematisation. When the Black theorist recovers the ability to properly read African mythology, he or she will make it impossible for the likes of Taylor, Jameson, and Rabaté to continue to proffer a Hegelianism that is the beginning and the end (and, therefore, the eternally-returning) of philosophic and literary theory. On the African factor in literary theory, notice, for example, that due to his colonial education, it took Césaire a while to realise that it was his own African legacy that the French Surrealists were playing back to him; this is because the Africa that Surrealism gave him occurred to him only gradually; the realisation does not seem to have been instant. The Black literary theorist will overcome the problem of misrecognising himself/herself in canonic (Western) High Theory, as Hountondji's '*alexia*' led him to do, by unpacking Hegel and

chipping at his uniqueness and prestige. Only this way will the theorist end Hegel's unnerving influence on the elaboration of Black literary theory.

Fictional Truth and the Future of Black Literary Theory

Literary reflection can improve on what Soyinka accomplishes in *MLAW* by covering a wider Africa and honing critical insight into theoretic acumen. Even postcolonial theory is inadequate in explicating what Senghor appropriately refers to throughout *Ce Que Je Crois* as "l'Afrique des profondeurs," and which must be distinguished from the superficial and largely ineffectual Africa which the colonial legacy has produced. As postcolonial text, therefore, *Osiris Rising* writes back (Salman Rushdie) to the centre from a specifically African standpoint to say that many Judeo-Christian and Euro-American assumptions about the origin and functions of Writing are no longer tenable. As a phenomenological Black text, it (with the DBSC, *Cane*, and *Myal*) more authentically engage the history of time (and of narrative time) from the other end by theorising African history not as that which began with the arrival of Europeans (a perspective which would make the European origin of the Novel more defensible), but by retheorising Africa in a way that positions it at the centre, away from the inertia of its current peripheric status. By exposing the suppressions, sets of biases, and contradictions in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and modernist, theories of the essence of Blackness, new literary theory should be able to chart for the Black tradition a much better-structured idea of its origin, identity, and purpose. It should be able to interrogate on more solid intellectual grounds existing orthodoxies regarding the universality of the classical and modernist novel. In light of how ancient history has now been brought to bear on a number of very confusing literary issues, Black literary theory

now has the intellectual confidence to justify its scepticism vis-à-vis absolutist scientific logic and its infinitely more refined sleights-of-hand and reinscriptions, as is the case with the Derridian banishment of all origins. This obliteration of memory is what Caroline Rody appears to be endorsing, given the ontological status she accords the preferred horizontal plot she postulates. The phenomenological interest of the three novels is, again, that they encode that which is truly essential to a people's psyche, the spiritual and philosophic bedrock upon which existential, everyday, life is founded. The novels seek to clear what is an induced, often violently enforced, confusion regarding Africa as a referent; not by idealising Africa, but by positing a fundamentally optimistic outlook that is innate. The novelistic genre is eminently suited to induce new literary theory, because of its innate effectiveness as a site for contesting onto-epistemological reductivism. This property of the novelistic form as it is artfully dramatised in *Osiris Rising* provides a springboard for the literary task of clearly pointing out how certain ideologies of history have nudged critical debate away from alternative currents in the history of the Novel. More specifically, the West's racialisation of aesthetic theory, of the concept of good and evil and, more recently, its extreme forms of metafiction and metatheory and the often unbridled abstractions they tend to indulge in, can now be engaged more lucidly, thanks to *Osiris Rising's* radical deracialisation of accounts (Judaic, Christian, Islamic, etc.) of the Word itself.

The hermeneutic guidance Armah's novel offers the theorist organically makes it possible to access an antecedent historicity whose alternative truths supplement and renew the resources available to theoretic work. Such a guidance offers the prospect of intellectually overcoming the merely intermittent, fragmentary, and imperfect, theories or genealogies of Black narrative subjectivity permitted within the artificially lean menu of previous onto-epistemologic data. To the new temporal imaging of Africa, must be added

the spatial: the idea of ancestral geographic space conceptualised as home. When in his Harlem Renaissance poem 'Heritage' (1926) Countee Cullen asked the question:

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang? (24)

the only knowledge of Africa that dominant critical discourses had allowed access to by then often permitted only rather vague, ambivalent, or exotic interests in Africa. Africa was still rather impossible to quantify in any consistently uplifting way. To that extent, as we will see later, even DuBois's interest in Black Africa was at times half-hearted, given the tension and lack of confidence this interest and his Victorian values created in him. Generations later, Cullen's fellow Black writers Césaire and Gates have a much less ambivalent (not necessarily idealising) appreciation of Africa's intellectual interest. A renewed diasporic imaging of Africa as home (space) is of theoretic interest, since, in the renewal and completion of the realisation of the peoplehood of Africans and people of African descent, Africa as geographical ethnic focus becomes a consolidated literary, theoretic topos. As ancestral space that is inhabited or lost, but ultimately recoverable (physically, imaginatively, spiritually, etc.), Africa is renewed in intellectual status not as the sole regulator of all Black theoretic thought, but as a necessary onto-historical pole in the sense-making teleology my thesis proposes. The reformulation of the home thematics as identity-forming topos should go a long way to mitigate the limbo status of Black literary theory in its endless catch-up relationship with Western High Theory.

Osiris Rising has widened the referential range of Black fiction and eliminated the variety of intermediaries between the Black person and the divine Word and Sign. The discussion of the issue of intermediaries, central to postcolonial and Black critical theories, is thus incomplete without a comment on the related idea of God as invoked to

justify slavery and colonisation. In whatever terms this agency (God) is conceived by perpetrator and victim, by building on the discursive deck-clearing work accomplished by a work like Armah's novel, literary theory can now increase even further the meaning of Africa through a more direct reading of God's mind to see what His/Her/its (not anyone else's) will is for Black people. And I mean "God's mind" not necessarily in a theological sense, but, for example, in Einstein's and Hawking's sense of the force or intelligence that caused the birth of the universe, what its nature is, and, therefore, how, by formulating a concise theory that explains this beginning and what has followed it, we can be said to have unlocked the ultimate secret of the universe, and to have, at last, directly figured out what we are doing here on earth, as against what any insincere interest-group or institution tells Blacks is their mission and destiny. For Blacks and other minorities, this is not a trivial matter. Again, far from being merely incidental this is a main issue as can be seen in Haynes's call on disciples, including literature, to redeem Noah's curse, though even the liberal Haynes cannot let go of an engrained Eurocentric, judeo-Christian, bias. To him, Christianity remains the paradigm within which the particular subject here victimised (the Black one) should pose its new identitarian discourse. At its inception in ancient Africa, the divine and creative Word was fundamentally untainted with any sense of nationalism. As gift to humankind, it operated at a supra-ideological level before organised religion (of various denominations) appropriated it for different agendas. By the time the Word was set down in writing by non-autochthonous Egyptians and peoples inside and outside Egypt, it already contained the flaws Rousseau and Henri Bergson would later point out, as well as the seeds that would fuel Derrida's obsessed attempt to relieve Western metaphysics of its logocentric hubris. For, according to Ricoeur in the above-mentioned essay,

[The] Platonic attack against writing is not an isolated example in the history of our culture. Rousseau and Bergson, for different reasons, link the main evils which plague civilization to writing. For Rousseau, as long as language relied

only on the voice, it preserved the presence of oneself to oneself and others. Language was still the expression of passion. It was eloquence, not yet exegesis. With writing began separation, tyranny, and inequality. Writing ignores its addressee just as it conceals its author [and passes itself off as objective and universalist]. (333)

It is an irony that the originators of the seminal conception of language (and its redemptive and imaginative uses) that I have been discussing are demonised today by various regimes of discourse. Such is the gist of Michael Rice's observation that:

In the Middle Ages the stories in the Christian Bible kept Egypt's name alive with the figure of 'Pharaoh' looming formidably over the fortunes of the Christians' notional confessional ancestors, the Jews and their supposed 'captivity' (*Legacy*, 197)

On the strictly artistic and inspirational values of Egyptian writing, he asserts:

Without an awareness of Egyptian architecture and many of its decorative elements, the Renaissance is hardly thinkable; the decipherment of hieroglyphs became something of a passion amongst scholars who believed that all manner of mysteries and wisdom were contained in their beautiful and innocent shapes....The single most important element which alerted the imaginations of artists and philosophers in Renaissance and later Europe was the system of writing which had evolved in the Valley in the latter centuries of the fourth and the early centuries of the third millenia. (*Legacy*, 197)

Interrogating the Torah and the Bible

Black Egyptology's new archeology or genealogy of the Word that leads to a deconstruction of the Torah and the Bible should bring about a new look at literary history as well. Such a fresh look begins with the examination of the *Book of the Dead* as a prototypical literary text and, more, as the kind of onto-epistemological anchorage Césaire did not suspect Africa had produced autogeneously. To this extent, the uniqueness David S. Ariel claims for Judaism in *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* and in *What Do Jews Believe: The Spiritual Foundation of Judaism* is untenable; and will increasingly be so in the decades to come. The perspective he brings to bear on his historicisation of Judaism is one that Africans as well as Freke's and Gandy's works already have reservations about. To these critics, a thinker like Ariel

does not fully account for the genealogy of Judaism in the total history of mankind. For example, Ariel demonises Egypt explicitly, while there does not seem to be in his works any acknowledgement of Judaic borrowings (spiritual, philosophic, artistic, etc.) from this Egypt. Regarding literature proper, it is interesting that, in *The Mystic Quest*, he approvingly quotes the Yiddish Nobel laureate for literature Isaac Bashevis Singer's instructive distinction between mysticism and organised religion. Singer is worth quoting at length:

Mysticism isn't a line of thought separated from religion. They both share a basis in the human soul – the feeling that the world is no accident or blind force and that the human spirit and body are closely linked with the universe and its Creator.

If there is a difference between religion and mysticism, it consists of the fact that religion is almost completely dependent upon revelation. All religions have preached that God revealed Himself to a prophet and communicated His demands through him. Religion never remained the property of a single individual. It appealed to a group. It often tended to proliferate and take in whole tribes and nations. Religious leaders often forced obeisance to their faith with the sword. Because of this, religion tended in time to become routine and closely linked with social systems. Mysticism, on the other hand, is individualistic. True mysticism has always belonged to one person or a small group. It was and it has remained esoteric. The mystic never completely relied upon the revelations of others but sought God in his own fashion. The mystic often assumed the religion of his environment, but he tried to extend it by coupling it with the higher powers; actually to become a prophet himself.

My personal definition of religion is a mysticism that has been transformed into a discipline, a mass experience, and thus grown partially diluted and often worldly. The more successful a religion is, the stronger its influence, the further it recedes from its mystical origin. (13-14)

Singer's is a liberating distinction great writers before and after him have pointed out. In the Black literary tradition, you might say the above stance is also collectively that of Soyinka, Wilson Harris, the mischievous Ishmael Reed, and Armah, just to name a few of those who have engaged the issue of mysticism and unlimited potentiality. However, my real point is that this mystical, artistic, and intellectual perspective predates Judaism, contrary to what Ariel's specific contextualisation of Singer at this point in his book suggests. The mystics of Alexandria (where Greece accomplished many of its "discoveries") got that idea of mysticism from the Egyptians; and much of it went out of Egypt with the Egyptian Moses (disciple of Akhenathon, mystic, and monotheist) and his

followers who had rebelled against the polytheist priesthood. Armah's own ancient mystics in *Osiris Rising* keep their distance from the ancient priests who, in the past, thought some things immutable, a fact not lost on the artist Bailey in Armah's novel.

Psychoanalysis and Egyptology

With his publication in 1965 of *The Interpreters* and his (subsequent)1973 comment that "We must stress....language, stretch it, impact and compact it, fragment and reassemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden of experience and experiencing,"¹ Soyinka touched off a row over the 'appropriate' form and morality of the African novel. Taking the experimental thrust of the novel as a lack of social commitment, such critics as Chinweizu and Echeruo have indicated that the novel did not disturb them, meaning that it had no social relevance, due to its 'deviation' from convention. Like-minded commentators mistook the injunction regarding the liberating dynamics of language as some kind of pointless aestheticism. Yet, Soyinka, who defended African culture in such in-depth and articulate terms in *MLAW*, wrote that novel in part to cast an ironic look at the élite shortly after independence, and at what Africa meant and what the élite seemed to think it meant. Pronouncements and works like Soyinka's were, of course, not a disavowal of ethnic belonging and social commitment. They were meant to refine self-apprehension and to hone observation of the crucial choices society was going to have to make when, with the achievement of political independence, the collision of the past and the present made such choices far from easy. Events in Africa today only confirm how justified Achebe, Fanon, Soyinka, and others were in their misgivings about the excessively bold declarations of politicians at that time. The process of reimagining the self, ethnicity, and society, involved an engagement of these entities beyond the protocol or template of simplistic racial or

group conformism. For, there is a sense in which such attempts to homogenise were a sign of alienation and a legacy of colonial education. The ensuing tension between racial conformity in discourse and individual(ist) formulations and aestheticisations of essence ushered in a different set of problems for African literature and the problematics of racial identity. The accentuation of a new code in artistic expression in African and Black literature, as we see in truly experimental fiction in this tradition, is the result of a new economy of the possibilities or resources for creativity and critical endeavour whereby historical/collective agency in the protocols of race and public identity is newly seen as but one element in a total phenomenology of being.

I have briefly discussed Soyinka's (and Armah's) experimental writing as a prelude to my Pan-African discussion of one of the most encouraging contributions to Black literary theory in recent times: Claudia Tate's *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*, published more than two decades after Soyinka's comment and novel. Because it recovers for Black theory spheres of reality or enquiry that had been deemed secondary, the book has the effect of increasing and enriching the real meaning of Blackness (conceived in African-American and Pan-Africanist terms) by sounding its full range; though Tate does not consistently formulate the issues in these terms. She draws on Freudian psychoanalysis, object-relations theory, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue the complexity of individual and even community identities. She shows how transgressive Black desire can be in textual language and how it can more radically challenge not only racist discourse generally, but point out the inner contradictions of psychoanalysis and related sciences themselves as these have been applied to Blackness.

What is of real interest to us here is the book's own status as counterdiscourse, and the depth of its sense of historicity. Briefly stated, in the context of my thesis's revisionist (re)reading of Africa's significance in the history of ideas, and in the context of

Tate's own diasporic, ethnic, charting of the evolution and pros and cons of psychoanalysis, her overall understanding of the discipline is incomplete, as we are about to see. This is mainly because her probably classic (not revisionist) Euro-American education causes her to restrict her discussion to the Western hemisphere and, as a result, hers remains a mainly materialist reading of psychoanalysis which narrows her general take on the deep causes of the woes of psychoanalysis so increasingly decried by various subjectivities (gendered, racial, sexual, etc) by the end of the twentieth century.² Tate's informative and fine theorisation of an expanded Black subjectivity could have gone farther. In order to enact a more thoroughgoing interrogation of psychoanalysis, she will have to mentally or physically reverse the Middle Passage (as does the fictive intellectual Ast) to access a more complete genealogy of psychology and psychoanalysis, and recover for Black literary theory the ancient origins of psychoanalysis in alchemy. Along with making a convincing case for the benefits of a psychoanalytic approach to African-American literature, Tate also registers her misgivings. On the latter point, she notes:

while psychoanalytic theory can help us analyze the social pathology of racism, its practice has carried a lot of irritating baggage that has made it virtually an anathema in the black intellectual community. Rather than simply denounce psychoanalysis or regard it as a metadiscourse, I try to understand its own compensatory defenses by questioning the cultural effects of its Jewish origins in anti-Semitic Austria at the turn of the twentieth century. Such origins have produced a psychoanalytic practice that silences its own ideological history by presuming the culturally neutral family as its object of investigation. This displacement is important because it designates the family as primarily responsible for the tragic fates of real individuals who, for example, are like Bigger Thomas of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) or Pecola Breedlove of Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* (1970)

By isolating the family from societypsychoanalytic practice has avoided examining the relationship of social oppression to family dysfunction and the blighted inner worlds of individuals....psychoanalysis centers the individual's primary nurturing environment, not the external circumstances....As a result, [mainstream] psychoanalytic practice...effaces racism and recasts its effects as a personality disorder caused by family rather than social pathology. (16-17)

The psychoanalytic constitution of Black subjectivity is still problematic. Its accounts of this subjectivity in slavery, emancipation, coloniality, and post-coloniality mistakenly or deliberately delimit and restrict the ethnic self. It cannot adequately read and represent Black phenomenological subjectivity either, due to a racist bias and a methodological ineptitude it has developed over time. This procedural flaw or malice explains why in *MLAW* Soyinka refers to Carl Jung as “begetter of so many racist distortions of the structure of the human psyche” (34). It may, therefore, be helpful to engage modern psychoanalysis from the other end: to historicise and read it from its very ancient earliest manifestations. For then, we are able to see its epistemological constitution and evolution in a more instructive light; in a register that enables us moderns, if we are so disposed, to see it as a failed initiation. Before it became politicised, biodetermined (race and gender), perverted and allied to questionable agendas, psychoanalysis, as accounted for by Egyptology, had no innate bias. Thus, Kolpaktchy points out the Osirian connection of psychoanalysis by locating its earliest manifestations in Egyptian alchemy. He traces and explains the benefits of the mystical dimensions of ancient alchemy till the beginning of the French revolution, and explains how alchemy is the basis of “tous les courants du christianisme ésotérique” and that , “exprimée dans le langage visionnaire du Haut Moyen Age, elle s’allie à la mystique du Saint Graal et, plus tard, au mouvement d’idées des Rose-Croix. Ces courants issus des mystères égyptiens se retrouvent , se croisent sous le ciel du Nord” (67). To Kolpaktchy, modern psychoanalysis is a science completely unhinged from its mystical groundings or origins:

La psychanalyse offre un autre exemple d’un courant souterrain surgissant inopinément à la surface: c’est le dernier rejeton – abâtardi et dénaturé – de l’alchimie et, par cela même, de l’osirianisme. Tel l’alchimiste d’autrefois (mais qui éliminerait, préalablement et d’une façon radicale, tout sentiment religieux ou mystique et toute considération d’ordre morale) le psychanaliste [moderne] observe du dehors, guidé par la confession du patient, les processus se déroulant dans son «oeuf philosophique» (c’est-à-dire, dans le patient se

trouvant devant lui). Comme l'alchimiste d'autrefois, le psychanaliste prétend diriger les étapes d'une «*purification*» (katharsis), mais sans savoir au juste au nom de quelle «pureté» il procède. C'est un apprenti-sorcier maniant à l'aveuglette des forces insoupçonnées. La psychanalyse ayant reçu de Freud une orientation matérialiste, athée et amoral, veut ignorer la lutte, dans l'âme, des courants aussi angéliques que diaboliques; telle ne reconnaît que les seconds et remue avec délectation la boue qu'elle y trouve. Or, l'opération alchimique se faisait dans un sens inverse, ne tenant compte que du principe lumineux et angélique. (67-68, emphases added)

I have quoted Kolpaktchy at length to make the point that it may be necessary for Black theory to go this far back into the beginnings of psychoanalysis to explain why its overly secularised modern version often cannot sufficiently account for Black subjectivity. Tate, the racial and gendered subject, is right in her misgivings about the objective status of science tainted with biodeterminism. For, in mainstream psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology on African reality, the verdict is the same: racist bias and methodologic flaw. It is indeed unfortunate that the psychoanalyst often in effect demonises and condemns the Black subject in advance, as Tate's and Soyinka's comments show. But again, with more historical depth, Tate's strictures would have had more argumentative and intellectual punch. Tate should have gone beyond Austria and Europe for the genealogy of psychoanalysis before enacting her discourse on it. There may be a reason why she did not do this. She seems more interested in how private fantasy/the libido as desire and 'second' text (as counternarrative) undermines the authority and linearity of realist narration/ the 'first' narrative. Nowhere in her book is there an indication that Pan-Africanism can be a viable paradigm within which to valorise her reservations about psychoanalysis. Some seventeen years before Kolpaktchy's book, Soyinka made, in similar terms, observations about psychology and psychoanalysis. Soyinka elaborates on his comment on Jung thus:

[Jung] interchangeably [sic] employs ritual archetypes and images of psychotic fantasy. While the intrusion of archetypal images into the psychotic condition (or fevered, drunken deliriums for that matter) is an acknowledged occurrence, Jung's perception becomes narrowed in his indifferently hierarchic relation of such products of the disturbed mind to the immanent quality of the ritual archetype. The one is de-contextualised, unharmonised homologue (at best!) of

the other, deprived of meaning and relatedness (or wrenched out of normal relations into abnormal ones). Image shorn of, cut off from, symbolic relations with apprehended reality. The profession of the psychoanalyst lies in the sorting out of the new discrete images from their hostile environment; he has no equipment (as an outsider) for the equation of such images themselves with the essence-reality of their origin. (34)

Psychoanalysis specialises in focussing on the individual in the family. And it does so by focussing on personality disorder only. Kolpaktchy shows why this is a departure from the overall direction psychoanalysis should be going in. Jungian psychology or psychoanalysis can only see Black African (and other aboriginal) reality as a dysfunction since it "lack[s] the *language* to penetrate [these cultures'] own [modes] of signification." (Soyinka, 35) . Tate correctly attacks the "hidden ideological suppositions" in the way Freudian psychoanalysis constructs the gendered subjectivity. More pertinently for us, she is also correct in pointing out that "black critical theory has seldom engaged psychoanalysis" (17). She further states that Blacks, especially of the diaspora, have shunned mainstream psychoanalysis not only because they have found it lacking in objectivity (it allocates a pathological status to the racial subject, instead of acknowledging the body social as pathological -- the same point Lubiano makes, above), but also because the harsh social reality of life for most of them in America has often caused African-Americans to shuffle their priorities, leaving them not much time to take a deep historical look at psychoanalysis. They have had no time to see how Africa can possibly have had anything to do with the inception of the discipline. Again, Tate's approach is essentially limited to how the private Black self problematises the social Black subjectivity, whereas Soyinka (like Carruthers, Robinson, Paget and others) goes farther and is interested in the recovery of the redemptive racial ontology that grounds subjectivity, and that problematises the reductionism or simulacrum of Western theories of Blackness. Black literary theory can engage psychoanalysis, though Tate seems unaware of the extent of the full research needed to formulate such a counterdiscourse.

On Freud's obsession with the family and the price various minoroties have paid for his science, Kolpaktchy takes a chastening parting shot at Freud and Freudians: "Freud qui traitait avec un extrême dédain le sentiment religieux (ou mystique), le considérant comme un phénomène pathologique, une espèce de *névrose*, aurait été bien surpris, s'il avait appris que sa «science» lui arrivait – à travers l'alchimie – de la pénombre mystérieuse des sanctuaires égyptiens.... " (68, emphases added)

The Black African factor in Egyptian alchemy is not difficult to establish either. In her recent study of Wilson Harris, *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: A New Architecture of the World*, Sandra Drake not only recovers alchemy and connects it to the thematics of rebirth, resurrection, and plenitude; she also subsumes it in a genealogy and trajectory in the evolution of civilisation already posited by Senghor, C. A. Diop, and others. She writes:

Metallurgy is a very old art in Africa, and the metal worker commonly has a special, even religious, status in African societies, including the society of ancient Egypt. Although less exclusively than is the case with the Anancy figure and carnival [in Caribbean culture], alchemy,...is also connected to the African tradition. It came directly from West Africa, where it takes special forms such as the rites connected with divination and sowing, planting and reaping. These areas of Africa are the seedbed of old traditions and customs that were elaborated and refined by the Nile Valley civilizations and then through diffusion and migration reacted back upon the areas that brought them forth.(142)

Like Carruthers's above, Kolpaktchy's perspective on psychoanalysis, as quoted above, suggests that Freud may have done as much wrongheaded harm as good in trying to help us understand our psyche -- a view many modern critics have expressed recently. Some have said that, all in all, the discipline of modern psychoanalysis may be part of the problem of understanding the mind; not part of the solution. To critics like Kolpaktchy, this is partly because modern psychoanalysis often examines but leaves the patient as it finds her or him. It does not consistently operate according to the alchemical principle of changing the patient and making him or her more complete and well-rounded in the broadest sense.

The distinction between newness for its sake (especially characteristic of fast-paced cultures and economies like America) and original thought that has real substance, between the ephemera of periodised knowledge and the complexity of "deep thought," is crucial. On this point, a comment by Jean-Michel Rabaté is of interest. He remarks on how: "We have seen how Theory has always been haunted by a myth of the 'hard sciences' so as to provide a respectable basis for true knowledge, while in fact these models have provided only trendy metaphors." (143) Black literary theory has had difficulty defining its identity mostly because too often it is playing catch-up with High Theory, instead of holding on to the already felt realisation that no amount of foreign theorisations of the archetypes Africa and Egypt gave civilisation (given the inherent biases of these theorisations) can adequately represent the dynamics of these orders of knowledge. Only the most informed and lucid efforts which theorise Africa from within (beginning with Black Africa), can more adequately represent this gnosis. This is clearly the position Diagne, above, defends when he argues that "la théoristique théologique, cosmologique, anthroponymique, potonymique, socio-technologique et socio-politique pharaonique n'est définitivement transparente que référée au champ négro-africain. C'est une thèse. Je l'assume sur base d'enquêtes, comme pari scientifique" (141, emphases added). Indeed, it is not an overstatement to argue that a really complete understanding of such notions as the (Egyptian) Mysteries, the divine Word, magic, etc. is possible only from within the African world. Hence Soyinka's nuanced position, in *MLAW*, that:

The expression of a true self-apprehension is itself still most accessible today in the active language of cultural liberation etc.; that is, in order to transmit the self-apprehension of a race, a culture, it is sometimes necessary to liberate from, and relate this collective awareness to, the values of others. The misunderstanding of this merely expedient process is what in African academia has created a deified aura around what is falsely called intellectualism (= knowledge and exposition of the reference points of colonial cultures). To the truly self-apprehending entity within the African world reality, this amounts to intellectual bondage and self-betrayal. (VIII)

Derrida's prolific attempts to use an essentially African/Egyptian archetype to mitigate the excesses of Western logocentrism is instructive. From Plato, through Aristotle and Descartes, to Hegel and even Derrida, what has emerged are but shadows and caricatures of Black ontology. Only in their African contexts can the theories of the archetypes that have subtended spiritual and intellectual discourse, even in the West, make full sense. Western critical theory is only now reluctantly admitting this truism to itself, as we will see in a moment.

Randall Robinson's book, like C. A. Diop's *magnum opus*, *Civilization or Barbarism*, is a psychohistorical theoretic reflection which has a lot in common with the literary thematics of *Osiris Rising*, because of the premium it puts on the shadow versus the reality of Blackness and Africanness. And in the closing remarks of his recent collection of lectures delivered at Harvard University, *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas C. Holt refers to literary figures in the summative comment of his sociohistorical theoretic prognostic. Holt writes:

Certainly the history of African Americans contains some complex and difficult truths. Historically, to be African American has been to live on the razor's edge of ambiguity and seeming indeterminacy. The homespun proverbs abound "to make bricks without straw," "to make a way out of no way." Only our singers, our poets, and a few of our intellectuals have had the wit to name it. DuBois called it a "double consciousness"; Ralph Ellison hailed "the harsh discipline" of African American cultural life. More often unnamed yet lived experience, it is a timeless resource embedded in our personal histories and memories. From that lived experience come, to borrow Toni Morrison's haunting phrase, "stories to grow on." (122-123)

Somewhere between the spaces these two works occupy lies the site of new Black literary theory. Precisely on the future of theory, Cornell West makes the following comment on the related field of art criticism:

The future of art criticism...lies in a more thorough turn toward history, with each step in this turn making possible the next. First we must require of ourselves a more ambitious structural analysis of the present cultural situation (embracing a wholesale inquiry into both the personal and the institutional operations of power within the academy, the mass media, and the museum and gallery networks). Only then can we focus on the specific art object....And finally, in examining how significant art objects (those that are accorded stature in the articulated canon,

and those that are not) offer insights into the human condition in *specific* times and places, but also shape our view of the current cultural crisis, we will hear the silences and see through the blind spots that exist alongside those insights. (1993, 23-24)

But West's is not a literary project either, though he seems to readily acknowledge, in the same book, the continuing mystery and possibly superior power of art when he says:

The challenge [for theory] is a formidable one. Walking the tightrope between the Scylla of aestheticism and the Charybdis of reductionisms is difficult. And those few critics who pull it off do so when they are consumed by the power of the art objects that engross their curiosity, not when they follow the dictates of even the most subtle methodology. In this sense, evaluation is never an end in itself...but rather an integral by-product of a profound understanding of an art object, of how its form and content produce the multiple effects they do, and of the role it plays in shaping and being shaped by the world of ideas, political conflicts, cultural clashes, and the personal turmoils of its author and audience. (23)

This brings us back to Egyptology. In her identification of the desire for Egypt in old and recent Western fiction, Doody believes that: "If Kerenyi is remotely right, almost every one of the ancient novels constitutes a sort of midrash on the story of Isis" (171). All stories (not just Black ones), including most specifically *Osiris Rising*, are a midrash on Osiris and Isis. Therefore, if Black literary theory begins to systematically consider Osirianism as a constant in Black and world fiction, and as underpinning a good number of schools of critical theory, it just might see emerging an abundance of lodes which lend themselves to theoretic formulation, and out of which a more organic identity for theory becomes possible. The depth of relevance ancient Africa and Egypt have for modern Africa in *Osiris Rising* bathes our understanding of Black historical agency and narrative subjectivity in a new light. It represents this ethnic subjectivity or identity not as emptiness or as an aberration, but as a site of what Kolpaktchy refers to as the concept or metaphysics of "la possibilité illimitée" (48).

On the issue of the unintelligible (Hare), foundational myth, and literary theory, who gets the right to tell these 'stories', at whose expense, and the results, Stephen R. Yarbrough writes from a somewhat different perspective:

Western discourse has from the beginning always relied upon the same, fundamental experience—one assumed to be shared by anyone who can think at all—as its ground. Such an experience does not assure that we are all fundamentally the “same”; in fact, it assumes that we differ fundamentally to the extent that our interpretations of the experience differ. To be sure, in Western literature this experience has been most commonly described in terms of the founding narrative of Judeo-Christian civilization—the story of the Fall. Original sin is the Judeo-Christian interpretation of the common experience. Yet this does not mean that discourses which employ the terms of this narrative are necessarily acknowledging Genesis as a “master text.” To assume so is to indulge in the structural-semiological fallacy and prejudice against prearticulate experience.

Today, largely due to this fallacy, the shared sense that there is or can be a primary experience has all but disappeared. We have gone far from the consideration of a unified world view, through pluralism and relativism and into a celebration of an atomistic heterogeneity that we call postmodernism. (37)

Time Scales: Africa in ‘Deep Time’

Discussion, even today, of which culture was the first to reveal the Word to humankind usefully leads to the necessity of rethinking the origin of Western metaphysics, and on to the future of Black literary theory. Such an approach is also an acknowledgement of the dimension of time and its fundamental importance to honest organisation of perspectival discussion of literary theory. Viewed from an African and Black perspective, in the West's representation of Africa, time has been in suspension. The emergence of the concept of “deep time” in the nineteenth century was momentous, because it implicitly undermined such a representation of Africa by posing anew the issue of the full significance of the continent in intellectual thought. In *Conversations About the End of Time*, Stephen Jay Gould elaborates on “the understanding of deep time” (19-20) in terms of “evidence of an immense length of time” (19) and of a human history “that stretched over an immense distance” (19). Paul Ricoeur (apart from Diop, Carruthers, and Kolpatchy) has urged us to think in these mega terms. Ricoeur's injunction is of particular pertinence because it is a literary reflection on the philosophical meaning of “deep time”. In *Le Tassili des Ajjer*, the Algerian archeologist and feminist Hachid uses essentially the same method as Gould as a necessary detour to engage

racism and sexism in Islamic North Africa. Like Gould, she reads fossils and other traces "pour retrouver les premiers «Sahariens» de la Préhistoire avant même le Sahara" (15). She identifies these first inhabitants of this region as a negroid type she calls "les têtes rondes". Hachid comments at length on the haunting depth of the frescos and other works of art of these "round-headed" first humans, draws on them to read Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger," (171) and implicitly challenges the thesis of Atlantis by asserting, like others, that the belief-systems of this negroid type was part of the foundation of Egyptian civilisation. On these points, Marceau Gast writes in his foreword to the book:

L'auteur insiste à juste raison sur l'apport de cet art à d'autres civilisations; celui-ci a joué un rôle important dans le ressourcement de grands artistes contemporains (comme ceux du mouvement cubiste) par le relais des arts premiers africains qui en sont l'ultime reflet. Plus d'une tribu africaine a dû puiser dans ce fond mythologique paléoafricain qui a certainement enrichi aussi le panthéon des divinités de l'Égypte pharaonique. (12, emphases added)

The human spiritual quest for meaning which reached the Middle and Far East as well as other parts of the world spread from this Egypt. Kolpaktchy recapitulates for us this important development in civilisation:

Dans les premiers siècles de notre ère, à l'époque de la prolifération des religions et des Eglises, l'Égypte vit naître deux puissantes écoles de gnoticisme, celles de Basilide et de Valentin; plus tard, un grand mouvement ésotérique, parti d'Égypte, transplanté en Iran, s'amalgamant avec d'autres courants gnostiques, ainsi qu'avec des éléments locaux, donna naissance au manichéisme, religion puissante et profonde qui eu une existence millénaire....Irradiant vers l'Est jusqu'à la Chine et vers l'Ouest jusqu'à l'Afrique du Nord et l'Espagne, les différents courants gnostiques atteignirent la région des Pyrénées (Mont Salvatge) et celle de la Bretagne. Là, ils s'amalgamèrent aux conceptions du christianisme ésotérique et aux traditions druidiques survivantes, et aboutirent à la vision du Saint Graal. (33)

In very similar terms, Freke and Gandy observe about the history of religion that:

In Egypt the first Christians we hear of are the Gnostics Valentinus, Basilides, Apelles, Carpocrates and his son Epiphanes. There is no sign of any form of Christianity which resembles Roman Catholicism in Egypt until Bishop Demetrius at the end of the third century....The school of the third-century master Mani became a world religion in his own lifetime. Eventually reaching from Spain in the West to China in the East, Manicheism flourished for 1,000 years. Mani was a great eclectic who synthesised the Gnosticism of different religious traditions in an attempt to create a truly international form of spirituality which would 'embrace

all humanity'. His followers taught that 'Judaism, Paganism, Christianity and Manicheism are one and the same doctrine.' (41-42 passim)

On gnostic Islam, we read:

Islamic Gnostics....do not see themselves as practising a distorted form of Islam any more than Christian Gnostics thought of themselves as practising a distorted form of Christianity....rather than trust the propaganda of [literalist] religious authorities, we would do better to trust the [Gnostics'] accounts of the origin and meaning of [spiritual wisdom]. (205-206)

Freke and Gandy then go on to make a point which corroborates a position the Egyptian Nawal al-Saadawi has often defended in interviews as a main idea in her feminist discourse:

The similarities between the original Christians and the original Muslims are not coincidental....The deeper meaning of Islam is the perennial Gnostic philosophy....Just as Christians picture God as a dazzling darkness, so Muslim Gnostics talk of Allah as a 'black light'. This Absolute Mystery manifests as a masculine principle and a feminine principle. For the Ismaeli and the original Christians, the mystical reunition of the two is the supreme image symbolizing Gnosis....The Ka'aba in Mecca, the most sacred site for Muslims, was once a shrine to the Goddess and originally the Qur'an sanctioned the traditional worship of God in feminine form....Islamic Gnostics continued the 'Sophia' tradition of the Pagan and Christian Gnostics, however, even treating Mohammad's daughter Fatima as an image of Sophia. (205-207 passim)

Clearly, one cannot accept the thesis of the origin of the Ka'aba and of the feminine principle of the Goddess and of Sophia associated with it -- so dear to Saadawi and, indirectly, to Hachid -- without ultimately having to make the connection to Isis.

The "deep time" perspective makes it easier to see the Black African factor in Egyptian religion and understand how religious consciousness moved with human evolution from sub-Sahara Africa, to the Sahara, before peaking in Egypt. In terms that are very similar to Hachid's, Senghor, in *Ce Que Je Crois*, gives a reading of human evolution and culture that highlights the significance of the Sahara and its first inhabitants: "le Sahara....après l'Afrique orientale, reprendra le flambeau en attendant l'Egypte. Il est, alors, peuplé de *Sans* ou Pygmées, de petits hommes jaunâtres à la tête ronde," (58) and, as I said in earlier chapters, Senghor, like Diop, Hoffman, Rice, Hachid, and others, confirms the contribution of these inhabitants to Egyptian religion. (The light-

skinned *Sans*, whom desertification pushed back to the south are part of today's African peoples, including South Africa where English-speaking Westerners refer to them as "the Bushmen".) On this issue of temporality, we note that the elicitation of an alternative history of the ancient world and the resistance to it from a dominant Judeo-Christian and Western discourse is something even Keith W. Whitelam anticipated in *The Invention of Ancient Israel*. Part of his account of the enervating effect of this realisation in an age of excessive academic compartmentalisation reads:

It became apparentas I searched for archeological and anthropological data....that this scheme was doomed to failure. The first problem....is that an attempt to write a history of Palestine, as an alternative to the standard histories of Israel which have dominated nineteenth- and twentieth-century biblical studies, runs the risk of being misunderstood as arrogant because it appears to imply the ability to control a vast range of material which is beyond the competence of most individuals and certainly beyond my abilities....However, the failure and metamorphosis of the project was due not just to an inability to become acquainted with or competent in....the vast amounts of data necessary for such a task. It stems from a more fundamental problem: the recognition that any such project has to confront and overcome the vast obstacle of what might be termed 'the discourse of biblical studies', a part of the complex network of scholarly work which [Edward] Said identified as 'Orientalist discourse'. The history of ancient Palestine has been ignored and silenced by biblical studies because its object of interest has been an ancient Israel conceived and presented as the taproot of Western civilisation. (1)

Likewise, the validation of Black Africa in Egypt and of Egypt as the tutor of Greece, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is bound to disturb. Yet, those who see the necessity of alternative readings are equally determined.

This brings us to philosophy as an offshoot of religion. When, in *Conversations About the End of Time*, Umberto Eco points out that "Hegel and Marx are unthinkable without Saint John the Divine" (185), he seems to be reminding the reader of how vectorial time, modern philosophy/Hegel, and modern science, and the onto-epistemological problems that have dogged them, are all products of a Judeo-Christian view of the world. He is also reminding the reader of the religious basis of Hegelian thought. It is a lead worth tracing in time, and I have been trying to argue that Hegel might actually be a case of an anxiety of influence. That, aware of the distant African

and Egyptian origin of his archetypes and concepts, he sought to erase these traces by building a layer of insulation and a diversion. This strategy has consisted in unleashing a particularly virulent assault on Black Africa and Egypt. As we will see in the next chapter, when viewed in deep time, the spiritual roots of Hegelian and Derridian philosophies and the African origin of these roots become clear, and offer a renewed perspective on overt and covert racism in literary theory. This realisation is a more radical way of engaging Hegel and Derrida than we are used to in the often mainly socio-political discourse of postcolonial theory. For once we realise the African origin of the main concepts and archetypes which underpin Hegelian and Derridian thought, we can refer back to the original versions and better see how racialisation and distortion have been naturalised as authoritative thought. Western metaphysics (and its cognitive ego) is flawed, because it reduces African Otherness to itself. Since African Otherness is incommensurable with this metaphysics, the latter disrupts the ontological principles which underpin the former. In its primordial infinitude, African alterity subsumes Judeo-Christian ontology and Western philosophy, for before the Word was incarnated in Christ, it had been incarnated in Osiris. And Western metaphysics's urge to assimilate the African Other into its self-present being and neutralise it is a totalitarianism which leaves it unprepared to countenance the primordial African Otherness which precedes Judeo-Christian ontology. One useful way to see why it may be methodologically necessary to mobilise ancient history to try to theorise the future trend of Black literary theory is to consider Toni Morrison's observation in her above-mentioned essay in *Criticism and the Color Line* that the significance of the Black presence in American literary criticism has been very deliberately silenced or undervalued: "Afro-American culture exists and though it is clear (and becoming clearer) how it has responded to Western culture the instances where and the means by which it has shaped Western culture are poorly recognized or understood" (18, emphases added). How Africa

responded to Western slavery and colonialism is mainly what postcolonial studies are often content to focus on; what my thesis tries to demonstrate is how the continent shaped Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Euro-American civilisation and, for that matter, its literature. As I hope to show in the next chapter, what Morrison argues for Blackness in America is what James Snead argues for Africa in world philosophy, though Snead does not systematically trace his insight to Egypt.

An understanding of the history of religion and philosophy is an understanding of the future of Black literary theory. This is why a re-theorisation of Africa in terms which imbricate Black Africa and ancient Egypt seems a necessary re-creation of Egypt as an intellectual discourse for a new turn in literary theory. There is, therefore, another end of time we might want to speak of; and that is the end of a Judeo-Christian and Euro-American monopoly on philosophy and literary theory, and the rise of the Time and Word of the Judeo-Christian and Western Other, as also implied by Doody, above. As far as Black culture is concerned, then, this new sense of history cannot be limited either by the limbo status suggested by Diawara's string of equivocations regarding the identity of discourse, or by the ghettoisation of discourse that Afrocentricity has often been accused of. This sense of history must enunciate its own vision of a "humanist postmodernism."

Egypt in Eleusis: European Modernism Revisited

Yet a "humanist postmodernism" may not be readily understandable without an awareness of a truly humanist modernism; say, Toomer's kind of modernism. That is, an aspect of modernism which strictly rationalist versions of it often omit. It is, essentially, a question of alterity, of another side of modernism, that makes it easier to see why Senghor and others maintain that African, Polynesian, and other aboriginal modes of being inspired European modernism. I approach this issue through a quick

discussion of Leon Surette's *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and the Occult*. The other-than-scientific factor is what I have designated in various terms in this dissertation, but which Surette generally refers to as "the occult." Yet, ultimately, Surette's book only reinforces our belief that Black literary theory cannot count on anyone to do an honest and dedicated investigation of Black contributions to theory. In other words, I engage *The Birth of Modernism*, mainly to point out its flaws.

Viewed from an African standpoint, therefore, *The Birth of Modernism* is, in the end, another disturbing instance of how tenacious academic prejudice can be even as it proclaims its objectivity. The tone of Surette's project is given thus:

Scholarship has now reached the point where the question of the relevance of occultism to Yeats, Pound, Lawrence, and even Eliot is no longer open. While not all the evidence is in, enough is in to render the strategy of scholarly avoidance obsolete. If we cannot expunge the occult from the history of modernism (and we cannot), then the sensible thing is to learn more about the occult so that we can not only recognize it when we meet it in a literary setting but also have a clearer sense of what it is that mainstream literary scholarship has been avoiding for the past fifty years and more. (10)

The book can be commended for pointing to a particular kind of obscurantism in Western literary criticism and literary theory. However, the question of nomenclature which Surette addresses in the opening pages is to us, in a way, a red herring. This is because, 'upgrading' the term "occultism" to Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, or Hermeticism, though understandable, does not quite address the fundamental issue of how a Judeo-Christian domination of intellectual discourse has determined and controlled all facets of this activity: from what is authorised and what is suppressed, to the appropriateness of terminology. It is important to raise the issue of terminology also because I do not see my thesis as being centrally about occultism. This is mainly because the term often has a negative connotation in the Judeo-Christian West. Besides, Surette and I are not tracing exactly the same historical trajectory. The ancient Africa I argue does not have to be called occultism. This is why the authors and scholars I refer to in my thesis are

not reducible to the label "occultists"; and I do not feel as isolated in theorising Africa as Surette does in his solitary bid to restore an 'embarrassing' dimension to Western literary criticism. Some prominent African writers have indeed wrestled with terminology, but not for quite the same reasons as Surette. Freke and Gandy's contrast of gnosticism and the three Abrahamic faiths clearly shows the sanctioning in the Judeo-Christian West of that which is non Judeo-Christian and non-Cartesian; so does Searle's account of science's obstinate habit of wanting to represent consciousness as anything other than what it is.

Like Rice, Surette refers to the centrality of occultism to Renaissance (42).

Occultism is indeed elitist, not out of contempt for ordinary humans, but out of necessity and, to a significant extent, as a matter of genius – necessarily selective, because uncommon. The initiated gnostic and the inspired artist who is a truly original thinker, by definition, belong to an élite. It is also true, at least in Africa, that gnostic and occult wisdom has been largely preserved through the ages, and is recognisable and comprehensible to the initiate. In general, mysticism continues to be part of the discovery process even in science, as when that which was not readily or always accessible in the full wakefulness of rational thought is suddenly revealed, through the mysterious workings of consciousness, when the body is at rest. Carl Sagan has commented on this phenomenon. In this special, élitist sense, the gift or acquisition of occult insight is a form of the rebirth Freke and Gandy have described above. Only the few awakened individuals are truly reborn.

Given my mainly literary interest, I see Surette making an interesting transition or connection when he remarks that:

Modernist scholarship has certainly not ignored the topic of mythopoeia – to use Nietzsche's term – but it has tended to approach it in an explicatory rather than investigative spirit. Although early studies – for example, Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1933) and Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1948, trans. 1951) – did stress the continuity between the overtly occult French symbolist movement

and modernism, later studies tended to be almost entirely explicatory. Examples of the latter are Lillian Feder's *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (1971), Daniel Hoffman's *Barbarous Knowledge* (1967), M. B. Quinn's *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry* (1955), and Philip Wheelwright's *The Burning Fountain* (1954). This shift from accounts of filiation of modernist mythopoeia with earlier varieties was no doubt prompted by the New Critical doctrine of textual autonomy and New Critical hostility towards scholarship itself – often dismissed as “source hunting.” (18-19)

In Surette's book, the rather general issue of “the relevance of Nietzsche to modernism”

(10) is narrowed down and redirected to help the reader get a grip on certain issues lying

behind or buried in the texts of a number of canonic authors:

More rarely it happens that a poet or novelist is himself or herself an occult visionary and registers an illumination directly experienced in his or her literary works. Blake and Yeats are well recognised instances of such cases. Blake regarded himself as illuminated in that he had visions and sought to convey their message in his poetry. But, of course, Blake also read Boehme and Swedenborg and learned much Zoroastrian and gnostic lore from them....Yeats was a different sort. He adopted the Blavatskian model and communicated with “masters,” illuminated ones from beyond the grave, who taught him the system published in *A Vision*. Yeats also experienced some visions, but they remained incidental to his poetry – as in the image out of “Spiritus Mundi” that appears in “The Second Coming.” Blake is a very rare case in that he was an accomplished artist who sought to elaborate his own “revelation” in his art. D. H. Lawrence is another such figure, but the occult nature of Lawrence's vision is not so well recognised....

Pound, I will argue, is a figure rather more like Blake than Yeats, and not at all the sceptical relativist that he is sometimes portrayed as being. Because there is relatively little of the mystical visionary in Pound's poetry – and still less in his prose – he has not been read in the tradition to which he truly belongs. (35, emphases added)

Now that the “secret” of modernism has been established as not being solely about “sceptical rationality,” we are in a position to consider what Surette calls “secret history,” a concept he elaborates on by putting it in context. Here too, Surette is worth quoting at some length:

It can be plausibly argued that T. S. Eliot formulated his cultural theories in the shadow of occult scholarship. His notion of a tradition that subsists somehow independently of official institutions and dogmas, carried by extraordinary individuals (*Kulturträger*) who acquire it by dint of energetic effort is an idea that bears strong affinities with occult notions of a secret tradition. Indeed, the strong anti-establishment cast of aesthetic culture in Europe since the Romantics is mirrored in occult history, which is always a history of an oppressed and enlightened alternate culture perpetuating itself only surreptitiously and with great difficulty. And, of course, the romantic nostalgia for the past is echoed in occultism's adherence to the ancient view of historical process as degenerative,

in contrast to the Christian providential view and its Jacobin and Darwinian heirs.
(38, emphasis added)

On how "occult history" helps initiates understand the 'rhythm' of history, i. e., the ups and downs of global affairs, Surette explains:

Occult history is founded upon the supposition that an underground élite has maintained itself throughout history and is present amongst us at this very moment. Whenever historical circumstances are favourable, the élite manifests itself. These historical moments – so the theory goes – are marked sometimes by cultural efflorescence, sometimes by political and social change, sometimes by philosophical and scientific achievements, and sometimes by religious reformation. Thus the occultists have an explanation for historical change that privileges individual agency: once in a while, enlightened individuals achieve positions of power and influence, and the results are momentous. Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* that Apollonian culture was introduced by Socrates fits this paradigm, and his argument for the superman in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is an even more extreme version of it. (38-39, emphasis added)

The interest of Surette's comment that " There is no single and undisputed standard version of the literary history of modernism, nor even one or two studies that could uncontroversially represent the range of approved versions" (158) arouses an African reader's (or many other minorities') anticipation, only to dash it. As I indicated at the beginning of my discussion of Surette, his book is, all in all, a disappointment. His project is remarkable by its complete elision of Africa, even if it can be argued that re-reading Africa is not what his revisionist study is about. On this score, even the above statement about the multiplicity of versions of modernism does not exonerate Surette. To us, he initiates a bold move, but blinks halfway; i. e., only shows a partial understanding of the history of his topic. Either his omission is deliberate, or he is just not aware of the African factor – which would be a more serious flaw for what it says about how he was trained. It is important to be attentive to Surette's rhetorical moves. For example, he writes: " Occultism seems to be an exclusively Western phenomenon (if one counts the whole Mediterranean litoral as Western)" (12). Surette's delimitation and definition of a Hellenic cultural space (16) and the occult legacy he credits it with only reinforce our suspicion. Concretely put, Surette shows no awareness at all of how Africa

shaped European modernism. (I have not read his *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, so cannot say if that work addresses this lacuna.) However, I note that on the very first page of *The Birth of Modernism*, he refers to that which, to him, most characterises the discourses of “representative modernist works” as “the mythological and Eleusian elements,” (IX) and returns to the theme of Eleusis at various points in the book. Surette does not once mention Black Africa or Egypt. It is frankly surprising that Surette does not seem aware of the Egyptian antecedent of Eleusian occultism or gnosticism. Yet, to take just one example, Freke’s and Gandy’s perspective on these important background issues in *The Jesus Mysteries* is very different:

The Egyptian myth of Osiris is the primal myth of the Mystery godman and reaches back to prehistory. His story is so ancient that it can be found in pyramid texts written over 4, 500 years ago....The Greek Mysteries celebrated at Eleusis in honour of the Great Mother goddess and the godman Dionysus were the most famous of all the Mystery cults....At the height of their popularity people were coming over from the then known world to be initiated: men and women....— even a Brahmin priest from India.... (22-27, *passim*, emphases added)

Freke and Gandy, like Diop, Rice, and the others, are very explicit in how Egyptian occultism shaped Greek and Western civilisations. They illustrate it with the case of a particularly illustrious Greek occultist, though not a literary one—but one to whom the Egyptians had taught “les sciences sacrées” (in this case, the mystical intuition at the basis of even a discipline like mathematics):

A wandering charismatic sage dressed in white robes and crowned with a gold coronet, Pythagoras was part scientist, part priest and part magician. He spent 22 years in the temples of Egypt, becoming an initiate of the ancient Egyptian Mysteries. On returning to Greece he began to preach the wisdom he had learned, performing miracles, raising the dead and giving oracles.

Inspired by Pythagoras, his disciples created a Greek Mystery religion modelled on the Egyptian Mysteries. They took the indigenous wine god Dionysus, who was a minor deity all but ignored by Hesiod and Homer, and transformed him into a Greek version of the mighty Egyptian Osiris. This initiated a religion and cultural revolution that was to transform Athens into the centre of the civilised world. (27-28, emphasis added)

Maybe none of Surette’s omissions should surprise us. For if we look at the names of the mentors he refers to, we should not find it difficult to see why he is replicating a reductive template of the history of spirituality and literature. At this point, we want to

read into Surette's correct statement that there are many versions of modernism, more than he must have expected we would dare to. In the chapter "Nietzsche, Wagner, and Myth," he explores the significance "in formulating Wagnerian and Nietzschean notions and of transmitting them to *Symbolisme*, and thence to Yeats, Pound, and Eliot" (158) in order to trace a constant, i. e., "[the] relation between modernism and the occult [that] is complex and intricate, but one line of filiation is clearly the importance of myth as both stylistic resource – as in the "mythical method" – and as a source of inspiration and thematic enrichment" (18). However, it is helpful to follow Senghor's account of the symbolist movement and Soyinka's discussion of the influence of Black African gnosticism on European modernism to arrive at a different idea of the genealogy and impact of what Surette calls "the occult." According to Senghor, around 1915, Samuel Rosenstock, AKA Tristan Tzara, launched in Paris the Dada movement, which became known as Dadaism, and then as Surrealism. This development and the history of German Expressionism provide us with a point of focus, a context, or an illustration, of a general malaise in artistic and intellectual circles in Europe after World War I. In his discussion of the initial encounter between Africa and Europe and the European artistic effervescence in early twentieth-century, Soyinka, in *ADO*, asks:

What was it that happened exactly in those few decades – that is, between the eighteen-eighties and the nineteen-twenties? What kind of transformation had taken place within artistic sensibilities of the West that enabled its avant-garde to respond – never mind the confusions and distortions – to [an African] culture that that other world had, after all, been well acquainted with in a quantitative dimension for at least four centuries? The very artifacts of that society were all around Europe. They had been brought back by missionaries, traders and company agents and later, colonial servants. A number of museums – like that in Ulm, Germany – had vast collections of these works. They had been sketched, painted and later, photographed by explorers, discussed in learned conferences and stored in private collections. Matisse was one artist who had one of the largest collections of African art, viewed (with some curiosity) by fellow artists; neither he nor his fellow Impressionists – at least not until Cézanne – appeared to have permitted any form of influence from these idioms in their works. Cézanne, we may claim, began the transition. (226)

Even as African and other non-Western belief-systems and art-forms were helping Europe find itself, these same people were being denied their humanity. Again, the point here is to see what genealogy of intellectual thought contributed to Surette's elision of Black Africa and Egypt. When, in the same book, Soyinka points out:

If, except in one or two instances, and largely through the disputed Egypt-Greek-Roman route, African cultures *appear* to have contributed little to the mainstream of world civilisation – always remembering that, for the African, this is a purely academic subject, not a matter for his spiritual and intellectual validation – it is important to recall even a fraction of the catalogue of Europe's chances, of the morbid pathology of its own scholars and explorers which called forth even in the twentieth century the compulsive denial of creative and intellectual continuity on the very soil that manifested the end-products of an enquiry. (234)

Soyinka is here specifically assessing the legacy of the irascible (because seductive but incorrigibly racist) Leo Frobenius. Soyinka is identifying a tradition of European bad faith which we cannot help but call conspiracy: the evidence and chances the West has had to construe Africa differently. Yet African gnosticism/occultism has all along inspired great literature in Africa and Europe. However, this fact has been blurred. For example, Soyinka speaks of African works "which even made immense contributions to a European revolution, the Renaissance" (Art, 189). There is more. Like Senghor, Soyinka calls the African impact on European sensibilities, a revolution. He draws a distinction between Hegel and Nietzsche on the one hand, and Wassily Kandinsky on the other, in their understanding and reaction to "the mystical New Man" (ADO, 227).

To Soyinka,

If African art and philosophy had any truthful authentic contact point with the Expressionist movement, it is probably through the Russian Kadinsky [sic], not too surprisingly perhaps since -- unlike, shall we say, the Oscar Kokoschskas of that movement -- his theoretical pronouncements appeared to be tempered by an apparent Russian spirituality, underplaying the superman rhetoric in the common onslaught on a reactionary social condition. The kind of 'community' later embraced by Otto Gross and Richard Ohring in what appeared to be later conversions from Nietzschean supermanism – these were embedded from the very beginning in Kadinsky's [sic] vision of the Expressionist man. (Art, 227)

Kandinsky's declaration that "It can be maintained altogether without exaggeration that a science of art erected on a broad foundation must be international in character: it is

interesting, but certainly not sufficient, to create an exclusively European art theory," (as quoted in *ADO*, 228) was a change in sensibility brought on by what was positive about *Négritude*, to take an instance of African influence. Serious *Négritude*, according to Soyinka, had an impact on German Expressionism, for it celebrated "the self rediscovered, re-aligned to the inner depths and spaces of communal and mystical self-realization" (*ADO*, 230). Again, Kandinsky's understanding of the above sensibilities contrasted with those of Nietzsche, another main figure Surette identifies as an occultist. I will return to occultism proper in a moment, but I am discussing Nietzsche (who also features prominently in Taylor's genealogy of deconstruction) in an African context here, to point out why, though Surette somewhat positively records him as the embodiment/originator of the awareness that led to the formulation of postmodernism (166), Black literary theory is wary of much of postmodernist thought.

Soyinka's discussion, in *ADO*, of the other faction of European Expressionism leads to the observation that, "an atavistic misunderstanding led the would-be artist beneficiaries in a Nietzschean direction, full of self-induced ecstatic rage and apocalyptic summons. (A similar trend was to take over the American stage in the late sixties, with the same incoherent results)" (226). The Nietzschean trend of Expressionism ultimately represented, therefore, an extreme form of reaction against fascism and the 'mechanisation' of man:

The European Expressionists had fallen victim to a Nietzschean delirium that glorified Man as primal beast, demolishing the soulless prettified walls of bourgeois society, and thus re-constituting Mankind in a blaze of creative energies. With only a limited understanding of its contextual genesis, they saw African art as a signpost. They viewed it, groped towards it as the true expression of man who seized the essence of being in the act of coming to knowledge of himself. (1988, 231)

Surette, incidentally, and in fairness to him, makes the same distinction between the true essence of occultism and Nietzschean philosophy:

At a little higher level of discussion it is sometimes supposed that even if natural scientists are themselves inclined to positivism and dogmatism, modern

theoretical physics confirms sceptical relativism. One often hears Einstein's relativism, Planck's quantum physics, and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle invoked as evidence that science itself concedes that positive knowledge is not possible. Of course, these principled limits on the accuracy and fineness of information in no way support sceptical relativism of the appropriate type. On the contrary, they define the practical limits of *empirical* knowledge, and do so without questioning empirical and Lockean theories of knowledge at all. Such principled limits to knowledge make no sense in a philosophy like Schopenhauer's or Nietzsche's where *all* supposed knowledge is mere delusion. (164)

Senghor is proposing an African occultist idea of poetics when, in *Ce Que Je Crois* he notes that " c'est dans le cadre de sa religion originnaire, l'Animisme, que l'homme africain exerce sa fonction d'animateur, de créateur de vie" (117, emphasis added). He is describing this mystical theory in praxis when he refers to the inner dynamics of this kind of African poetry variously as " une image ou un ensemble d'images analogiques, mélodieuse et rythmées....parallélismes asymétriques....allitérations, assonances et autres onomatopées des poèmes négro-africains et océaniens" (119, 218, 219, passim). And when he points out that in these poems "les images sont plus que symboliques," (119) he is, in essence, referring to what, in his discussion of language and Yoruba ritual music in *MLAW*, Soyinka calls a "masonic union of sign and melody" (148). These comments on African mystical art-forms are not only closer to Surette's description of symbolist art in modernism, they point out a philosophy of artistic composition Surette indirectly comments on thus at the beginning of his Conclusion:

Even though my subject has been literary modernism, I began with the Enlightenment and the French revolution, because I think that is where my particular story begins. It is also the period when the breach between religion and natural philosophy first opened wide in modern history. Philosophy, religion, and art had been the three pillars of European culture prior to that breach. Art and religion had had much more to say to one another than art and philosophy had, despite frequent quarrels, for they both articulated and expressed society's emotional life, a role that institutional religion has largely ceased to fulfil (280).

Senghor is even clearer on the animist/mystical elements in the deep structures of African occult poetry when, describing what African beliefs offered Tristan Tzara and the Surrealists, he tells the reader:

Pour [Tristan Tzara], ce qu'apporte essentiellement la culture noire, c'est-à-dire la poésie et les arts plastiques, la musique et la danse nègres, c'est une riche sensibilité, et spontanée parce qu'instinctive; mais humaine parce que mystique. En d'autres termes, c'est, pour Tristan Tzara et les surréalistes, une synergie de l'âme et du corps, une expression de l'âme par le corps ou, mieux, une expression surréaliste de l'âme. (218, emphasis added)

We note, in passing, that these dances and their purposes are not different from the Gurdjieff spectacles that moved Toomer so much, given Toomer's description of their objective.

In *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, Soyinka takes up the issue of gnosticism/mysticism/occultism in Black African poetry. First, a word about the question of nomenclature I raised earlier. Soyinka's comments confirm that many critics (including Surette) do not refer to these phenomena in literature as "occultism". Thus, Soyinka says about his and Senghor's tries:

Senghor attempted to distinguish [African surrealism] from [European] surrealism by naming it surreality, while I once manufactured "animysticism" as my contribution to this quest to trap the ineffable in the concreteness of words – I doubt if any "naming ceremony" will ever prove lasting, or satisfying. (174-175)

Through his reading of Birago Diop's much anthologised poem "Souffles" Soyinka sketches the contours of this mysticism with such phrases, expressions, or words as "animist grace" (171), " essence....rooted in the rituals and observances of African societies even till today [and] lies at the heart of their artistic intuitions, and establishes a solvent for pantheistic resolution of all spiritual urgings" (171-172), " a mystical exploration of the African worldview....a total derivation from source and from source alone" (172-173). Senghor, like C. A. Diop, asserts that, provided we are prepared to go back in history long enough and project ourselves back into the present to see the extent to which Africa is almost everywhere, we will realise that this African spirituality is a defining element of the idea of Africa. The occult conception of spiritual yearnings and of the Word occurred in Africa first. Senghor is, therefore, able to claim that such a conception is a defining African characteristic, and that it subtends the entirety of African

culture contrary to appearances: "La Négritude....sous-tend toute la civilisation africaine, même sous son aspect arabo-berbère. Mais l'accent doit être mis aussi sur la Parole, qui est, en même temps, poésie et art, c'est-à-dire Création" (117, emphasis added).

Surette reiterates his thesis and methodology thus:

The rationale for my study has been to abandon the normative procedure of selection followed by standard literary and intellectual history. In short, I have not restricted myself to approved discourses but have deliberately concentrated on authors and texts that have been excluded from the canon of works worthy of scholarly attention. Of course, I have not selected all disregarded texts but have picked out those whose filiation with one another and with modernist artists could be established. Such a procedure has produced a portrait of the modern age at variance with the standard view, which I suggest is a product of modernist ideology itself. (281-282)

Though Surette's motive might sound like my own in this dissertation, or, to be precise, in my discussion of modernism, my approach is definitely not a simple replication of an old thesis. For I show how, from an Africanist perspective, Surette remains complicit with the modernist ideology he is trying to debunk. I point out how he is very suspiciously vague about the African antecedents of main archetypes and concepts. In her above-mentioned essay on "unspeakable things," Toni Morrison offers an interesting idea of how this kind of laxity or calculated vagueness works. Shortly after discussing Christianity's appropriation of "the Orient", i. e., Egypt, she examines mainstream American literary criticism's resort to the same practice regarding African-American elements. She describes it as "an incipient orphanization of [the Afro-American text] in order to issue its adoption papers"(23). In less than two lines, as quoted above, Surette appropriates Egypt and the rest of Northern Africa and annexes them to the critical and theoretic territory of Euro-America. Again, to the extent that I have tried to show how Surette's book is a missed opportunity to give a truly comprehensive and humanist account of the creative potential of mysticism (occultism), my thesis is not just a replication of an old argument about the ups and downs of esoteric wisdom throughout the ages. Though giving a comprehensive, well-informed account may not have been

Surette's objective, or that the very possibility of it may not have occurred to him, my objection remains, nonetheless, valid. My thesis tries to show how Black Africa has not been central to most Euro-American accounts of this inspiring dimension of human consciousness that is mysticism (occultism).

Definitions of Blackness and of Africa

The result of the deliberate Euro-American muddling of the story of human evolution, of mythochronology, of which text to call humankind's first literary statement, etc., has been that Blackness has found it very difficult to define itself. New Black critical theory should make the task less arduous. To Pathé Diagne, putting an end to such debilitating inertia requires the realisation that "Le monde négro-africain gagnerait à se libérer du contenu d'une culture sémito-européenne qui continue derrière la pensée judéo-chrétienne, islamo-arabe ou libéralo-marxiste à projeter, sur lui, ses corsests et verroux" (88). This instability in the conditions of possibility of an easier African and Black identitarian grounding brings us, in these closing pages of my dissertation, to a revisitation (in addition to what has already been postulated above) of the perennial question of how to define Africa and Blackness. To have a sense of what Africa and Blackness mean, it is helpful to note two related ideas: the trajectory of human evolution and the emergence of civilisation as theorised by the scholars I have been discussing, and what, in *MLAW*, Soyinka calls "a universal humanoid abstraction" (X). In *Ce Que Je Crois*, Senghor makes observations about the history of civilisation that are of particular interest here, since they bring much needed clarification to what is Blackness and what is Africa. Well into his book, Senghor recapitulates the significance of southern Africa to Egypt in these terms: "L'Afrique australe, orientale et centrale....[est le] berceau des premiers hommes, [et] elle avait passé le flambeau [de la civilisation] au

Sahara et au Maghreb, puis....à l'Égypte" (63). In Egypt, occurred what Senghor calls "le Dernier Age dans l'art et l'écriture" (60), what I have been referring to as the peaking in Egypt of an evolving sub-Saharan Black culture. Senghor mentions "le Sahara....qui semble être un des berceaux, sinon le berceau, de l'Art" (66-67). Then, he continues:

Au Maghreb, c'est donc le Captien, qui, évoluant, se transforme en *Néolithique de tradition captienne*....Ce Néolithique au deuxième degré est caractérisé....par une vie sociale plus organisée....L'invention de l'art s'enrichit de sculptures comme de nouveaux objets de parure. Le dessèchement du Sahara, qui commence, va pousser ses habitants à émigrer, non seulement vers l'Afrique subsaharienne, mais aussi vers le Maghreb et la vallée du Nil, en favorisant, ici et là, mais surtout en Égypte, la floraison du Dernier Age dans l'art et l'écriture. (60)

As Hachid has argued, the negroid aboriginal peoples of the Maghreb invented art. This art-form followed human evolution into the Nile valley. And Senghor quotes Alexandre Moret's *Histoire de l'Orient* to confirm what Diop, Rice, Hoffman, and others say about the very first inhabitants of Egypt:

Ces premiers colons des vallées orientales [de l'Égypte] sont des *Négroïdes*, originaires des régions *indo-africaines*, chassés vers le Nord par la transformation des forêts en savanes, puis en steppes. Nous avons vu qu'ils ont peuplé l'Europe méridionale et occidentale et créé l'outillage aurignacien. (as quoted by Senghor, 70, emphasis added)

Senghor is adamant about the trajectory of civilisation: the North did not civilise the South; it was the other way around: "il ne faut pas renverser les rôles. Il faut partir du Sahara, comme de la Nubie, vers l'Égypte, et non le contraire" (68). With this overall premise in place regarding what Africa means geographically, culturally, and philosophically, comes the act of defining Blackness. Predictably, Senghor goes about it through an explanation of the essence of Négritude. He defines Négritude as "l'ensemble des valeurs de la civilisation noire"(136), and elaborates on this general idea by adding:

La Négritude, c'est une certaine manière d'être homme, surtout de vivre en homme. C'est la sensibilité et, partant, l'âme plus que la pensée. Caractéristiques sont, à cet égard, telles expressions africaines comme 'je veux que tu me sentes' et non 'je veux que tu me comprennes.' Rien ne traduit mieux cette façon de sentir que la nouvelle poésie nègre, qu'elle soit africaine, ou américaine, de langue française ou de langue anglaise. (139)

We note, in passing, that the African-American expression " Do you feel me?" is the same as what Senghor refers to.³ More on African continuities in the Americas later. The religion and art produced by this Black sensibility spread all over the continent. On this basis and on evidence produced by DNA, which he reproduces on page 104, Senghor writes:

Si l'on veut simplifier, les peuples d'Afrique se divisent, de nos jours, en deux groupes: en *Arabo-Berbères* et en *Négro-Africains*. Les premiers, qui habitent l'Afrique du Nord, sont des métis de Noirs et de Blancs, Sémites et Albo-Européens. Les seconds le sont de Noirs, Africains, voire Asiatiques, et de Khoisans. La réalité, que mettent en lumière les tableaux numériques des groupes sanguins, que j'ai reproduits plus haut, est bien plus complexe. Ces tableaux des différents peuples de notre continent, pour ne pas encore parler de «nations», prouvent l'unité biologique de l'Afrique, bien plus affirmée que celle de l'Europe ou de l'Asie. Dans tous ceux que j'ai eus sous les yeux, le groupe O vient en tête, et de loin comme en Europe, sauf quelques exceptions, le groupe A. Cependant, en Afrique du Nord, il y a un *mais*, représenté par l'Égypte. Son tableau est bien plus semblable à ceux des pays soudano-sahéliens qu'à ceux du Maghreb. (103-104, emphases added)

Equally pertinent, is Senghor's definition of Black African philosophy. Again, he does it through an engagement of Culture/philosophy: "Selon la définition que j'ai donnée du mot «Culture», il s'agit de découvrir les valeurs actives qui non seulement ont créé la civilisation africaine....Ces valeurs, on les trouve, d'abord, dans sa philosophie" (105, emphases added). In order to pinpoint the specificity of Black African philosophy, or rather the rationale behind it, Senghor compares, then contrasts, it with Greek philosophy to imply an originary African difference:

La philosophie, c'était pour les anciens Grecs, créateurs de la civilisation albe-européenne, la recherche de la *sophia*, de la sagesse. La *sophia*, c'est, d'abord la connaissance des principes fondamentaux qui, étant derrière les phénomènes de la nature et de l'univers, les produisent et les expliquent. Comme l'écrit Aristote dans la *Métaphysique*, «la science nommée philosophie est généralement connue comme ayant pour objet les premières causes et les principes des êtres». Telle est, cependant, la nature humaine que l'épistémè, la connaissance – traduire, aujourd'hui, par «science» -- ne suffit pas à l'homme. Pour être *sophia*, sagesse, elle doit passer à son application pratique en transformant notre vie par-delà nos idées et sentiments. C'est ainsi que la philosophie se transforme en morale. (106, emphases added)

He more specically identifies this founding African difference which has been there since the emergence of philosophy in Africa:

Or donc, comme les Grecs, nos sages ont fondé leur philosophie sur les premiers éléments de la matière: sur la terre, l'eau et l'air. Allant plus loin que les présocrates, qui, à ces éléments, avaient ajouté le feu et l'éther, Aristote trouvera une substance immatérielle, spirituelle, qui serait cause première et fin ultime. C'est Dieu, «l'intelligence qui se pense elle-même en saisissant l'Intelligible». C'est ici que la philosophie africaine, construite, au départ, sur des éléments similaires, se sépare de la philosophie grecque, albo-européenne, pour s'affirmer dans une identité sur laquelle a été fondée la religion et, partant, l'art. (108, emphases added)

The point is worth driving home: it is was out of this originary African philosophy (i. e., wisdom, born out of spirituality which then led to – but was not completely jettisoned out of-- philosophic speculation) that Art was born in human evolution. Like Senghor, Soyinka in *ADO* repeatedly defends this unique African conception of art, much to the disappointment of those who today, in order to push their own agendas (e. g., turn hybridity into the norm), claim there is nothing essentially African or Black. Senghor enumerates the three main features of this African philosophy. Here again, we will quote him for the sake of accuracy of rendition on this crucial issue:

Le premier trait de cette philosophie est qu'elle privilégie la raison intuitive comme mode de connaissance. Que l'intuition soit au début et à la fin du connaître, de la science, et même de la mathématique, c'est ce qu'affirme nombre de philosophes depuis Aristote jusqu'à Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, en passant par Henri Bergson, et de grands mathématiciens d'aujourd'hui. Comme le dit Bergson, par l'intuition, l'homme «s'installe dans le mouvant et adopte la vie même des choses». Les africanistes le savent bien, qui parlent de la «connaissance par participation» des Négro-Africains.

Le deuxième trait est la dialectique, au sens grec, étymologique du mot; au sens du dialogue pluriel....

Le troisième trait de la philosophie africaine est qu'elle est vécue dans la pratique: qu'elle est *re-ligion*. (108-109, passim, emphases added)

Senghor goes on to explain that because of this third feature, Black African philosophy was animated from the very beginning by a genuine desire for “un humanisme nouveau” (137) – the same genuine humanism at the core of Toomer's writing, and the same humanism most thinking observers agree is what the world now needs.

Our aspiration to something after postmodernism, to a new humanism, mystical, occult, or otherwise, brings us back to Toomer. Like Toomer, Senghor points out a misperception of race:

Aujourd'hui, on divise le continent africain en «Afrique blanche», et «Afrique noire». Cette division est politique, voire politicienne, et non scientifique. Pourtant, bien des anthropologues et ethnologues la maintiennent. Dans les années 1930, on distinguait les «Arabo-Berbères», les «Chamites» et les «Nègres», avec un accent péjoratif sur ces derniers. La vérité est qu'en cette fin du XXe siècle, tous les continents, toutes les races, toutes les nations sont plus ou moins métissés. Il n'est que de consulter leurs tableaux numériques des groupes sanguins. S'agissant de l'Afrique, nous pouvons y voir un peu plus clair en remontant de nouveau, mais brièvement, de la Préhistoire à l'Histoire. (102, emphases added)

Again, like Toomer, Senghor is not contradicting himself when, in the middle of a definition of the specificity of Blackness and Africa, he 'lapses' into an observation about how, at the end of the twentieth-century, all races are mixed. He, like, Toomer, is merely focussing the reader on the fact that it was Black blood which began the process by not only literally mixing with other bloods, but, also, as a culture, metaphorically, suckled other cultures by providing the founding archetypes and concepts that must now invalidate those other cultures' wrong-headed Judeo-Christian, Arabo-Islamic, claim to Judaic, Caucasian, Arab, etc., purity. In other words, the reality of a widespread African substratum should not, in a sleight-of-hand, be turned against any race-based African claim today by turning the argument around, and maliciously claiming that all there is today is "hybridity" and that there has never been anything African or Black, and that such a thing does not exist today. There is an African and Black specificity, in the sense of specific contributions Black Africa made to the history of ideas, to Civilisation. It is just a matter of nuance and perspective. It is this specificity and contribution that must first be acknowledged before we can expect Blacks to sincerely endorse any idea of a "brotherhood of Man" where race does not matter. True, races are significantly mixed today. But Black Africa's central role and contribution – how it has shaped the rest of humankind – is something the West does not want to acknowledge, because of the

implications such an acknowledgement would have for "who we are and what we in the West have been doing and thinking during our history—say in the past couple of millenia or so....the story that we tell ourselves"(Doody). In *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*, Ali A. Mazrui succinctly formulates this whole problematics in the following way:

As Africans begin to be given credit for some of their own civilizations, African cultural defensiveness will gradually wane....It is at any rate time it was more openly conceded not only that ancient Egypt made a contribution to the Greek miracle, but also that she in turn had been influenced by the Africa which was to the south of her. To grant all this is, in a sense, to universalize the Greek heritage. It is to break the European monopoly of identification with ancient Greece. (94)

Mazrui returns to Africa's significance in the history of ideas in his 1979 Reith lecture, published as *The African Condition*.

The specificity of Africanness and Blackness returns us to Soyinka's "universal humanoid abstraction" and brings us to his recent indirect re-opening of the issue in *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*. In this collection of essays written, not two centuries ago, but in 1999, Soyinka, much to the disappointment of those who want to quickly abolish all ideas of Africanness/Blackness while covertly pushing their own dominant or hybrid protocols, confidently claims a uniqueness for Black African spirituality and literature. This is because, like Senghor, Soyinka realises that Black Africa's significance has been deliberately underrated through a variety of obfuscatory accounts of History and Civilisation. In this book, Soyinka proposes a Black African mystical and artistic identity/specificity through his reading of Birago Diop. Having already referred to part of this reading, I now quote Soyinka at some length:

Birago Diop's justly famous *Souffles*....may justly be considered the poetic exegesis of animism....that unique spirituality of the African that establishes a continuum between the worlds of the living, of the ancestor and the unborn. The animist grace is made to imbue the Negritudinist sensibility with an essence that....contested the combined hierarchies of [European or Christian] materialist orientation on the one hand, and their spiritual ordering of the world on the other. This essence is rooted in the rituals and observances of African societies even today, lies at the heart of their artistic intuitions, and establishes a solvent for

pantheistic resolution of all spiritual urgings....This mysticism bears no relation whatsoever, and owes nothing to the European Surrealist venture that formed yet another paradoxical tributary to the Négritude movement....Diop's mystical exploration of the African world-view was a total derivation from source and from source alone. (171-173, *passim*, emphases added)

The search for Africa and Blackness leads, therefore, to the following recapitulation: Senghor has reiterated how the human adventure and civilisation began in sub-Sahara Africa; Blachère, Kolpaktchy, Hare, Doody, and others have pointed out how humankind is today obscurely drawn back to ancient Egypt; that which Surette correctly identifies as a gnostic wisdom which has always been around, is at times forced underground, but always resurfaces, is not, as he claims, an originally European form of knowledge. Not only is it originally African, as Soyinka argues, is it very much alive in traditional Africa today and available to the modern artist or philosopher. The resurgence of this ancient mode of being is, you might say, the periodic 'resurrection' of Osiris; the eternal return, in various forms, of Egypt. Yet, my thesis is not reducible to Surette's "occultism"; especially not to his erroneous genealogy of it. In other words, there is, again, what Africa really is and the genuine happiness the ancient Egyptians wished for humankind; and there is, on the other hand, what others say Africa is. Judaism, Christianity, Islam are among the main factors that helped invent and propagate the idea of Africa as outright negativity. In the name of organised religion, some races (and genders) have been stigmatised, people put to death, for refusing to adhere to an imposed canon of spirituality. There is the fabricated, demonised, Africa; and there is the Africa which, like any other culture has the right to exude confidence in itself and in the future. Judeo-Christian religion and philosophy are ultimately fragile institutions which, by their flawed and hegemonic nature, cannot but ultimately overstate their claims and overreach their mandate(s). This has created a crisis in spiritual, intellectual, and artistic discourse which, in the end, forces the parasitic discipline called literary theory to rethink itself. In the Black diaspora, Blackness is not only a reality but,

as Morrison shows, it has created a vibrant and respectable culture. This Blackness gives sustenance to those who care to associate with it. Yet, it is far from being a stagnant essence, for as Soyinka puts it, while this essence is still real, it is responsive to "a continuing objective [reassessment and] re-statement of [its] self-apprehension" (MLAW, XI). This essence even "possesses....in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity" (MLAW, XII). However, first, "[man] exists....in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique" (MLAW, XII). The African world is even more unique for having inspired other cultures. It is this unique, for it produced the hero with an African face who was the prototype for the other nine hundred and ninety-nine faces in Clyde W. Ford's 'signifying' act on Joseph Campbell. Ford's book, *The Hero with An African Face*, in essence argues how Campbell has excluded Black Africa from the history of mythology.

The challenge for Black literary theory now is to formulate a metalanguage which adequately represents not just the contours, but the essence, of its metaphysics. Only then will one begin to see in literary theory the African potential Roland Oliver speaks of above. I will, therefore, in the next chapter (my conclusion) return to the Egypt thematics and more firmly establish the link with literary theory by pointing to the poorly recognised African and Egyptian foundation of the philosophies of two incontrovertible figures in literary theory: Hegel and Derrida.

Conclusion

The new approach to history and philosophy I associate with the DBSC and Roland Oliver's observation regarding the belatedness of the appreciation of Africa's significance in history might be usefully construed as the positing of an alterity, in the rather special sense of a sudden emergence of a new image of Africa within historical discourse which enables us to cast a backwards look and significantly overhaul what we thought was our correct understanding of the continent. Clearly, the onus is more on the Judeo-Christian Westerner; though alienated Africans and other Blacks are here challenged as well. I will shortly touch again on the philosophical basis of this kind of historicist turn in theory. The same concept of alterity applies to Armah's *Osiris Rising*, on account of its status as a late work which modifies our appreciation of his overall philosophy of composition; an unanticipated key (compared to his other novels/ 'musical notes') which compels a teleological 'listening' back to previous 'scores', and a new sense of the possible range of registers.

In light of the contributions of the DBSC, a reconstitution of historical analysis is possible through a revision of a significant number of epistemological presuppositions that have underpinned Western critical historiography for very long. The positivist thrust of Western historical discourse on Africa is mainly a contextualism of a perverse kind. This is because its supposed scientificity is in reality the absolutisation of biased deductions generated by related disciplines.

At the frontier between philosophy and history, a fecund interfacing of disciplines materialises to suggest a philosophic exploration of historical knowledge. This is the space within which I appreciate the philosophic impact of the DBSC. The West's representation of African history in terms of historylessness results from a Western philosophic tradition which sees Africa in terms of fate and destiny, an inaccuracy which is itself a product of the more specific philosophic thematics of alterity. As Steven Feierman observes in the above-mentioned essay:

The loss of empire happened at a time when some thinkers were questioning whether historians and others in the human sciences were at all capable of describing the Other, or whether doing so they were engaging in what Emmanuel Levinas called "ontological imperialism," in which otherness vanishes and becomes part of the same. (51)

Clearly then, this is not a new debate; but what I am arguing is that the DBSC gives a new inflection to it by mounting a new and 'coordinated' Pan-African philosophic (not just postcolonial and socio-political) attack on this "ontological imperialism." This new or extended protocol of stricture avails itself of many of the latest findings in the sciences and the humanities. The Western absolutist ontology was indeed an attitude toward Black alterity which sought to appropriate the African Other, for example through the triumphalism of the Hegelian subjectivity as the outcome of his dialectical logic. It will gradually dawn on Western logocentrism that its ethics of alterity is flawed. The extension of Africa's cultural and philosophic space to embrace Egypt makes it easier to re-examine this issue: the attempt to engage Otherness not in the name of a sincere humaneness, but as a matter of domination and control fuelled the Western determination to reduce it to sameness. The attempt sought to confer a status that really meant sameness (more than difference), due to Western philosophy's allergy to independent forms of Otherness. However, because the unsurmountable heterology of the Black Other as referred to by Soyinka or Breton, for example, the primacy of the all-knowing Cartesian ego or subject became suspect in Western philosophy. Briefly put,

Western philosophy from Descartes to deconstruction has come to realise that there is an African alterity which precedes ontology as represented by it. Ricoeur too refers to this alterity above. A new critical apparatus is required to officialise and reinstate this alterity; and the philosophic propositions of the DBSC in a sense precipitate or accelerate its emergence. The trend in critical theory at this beginning of the twenty-first century is not toward more unwarranted absolutist theories of reality and compartmentalisation of disciplines. In *The Future of Theory*, even the irascible Rabaté intimates this when he observes that today, even science is:

Less a series of bold hypotheses about the universe followed by empirical refutations or verifications, as Popper would have it, than a number of parallel investigations all probing at the same time and from different points of view the paradoxes or aporias of current methodologies, ready to shake all preconceived ideas until one reaches new foundations....one has moved from "Theories of Everything" to a scientific practice working through frontiers and repeatedly jumpstarted by fecund encounters with impossibilities. (18-19)

Rabaté and other Westerners are, for different reasons, stating what *MLAW* is centrally about and what, millenia earlier, the Egyptians had known about the ultimate structure of truth: wholistic and interrelated, instead of absolutist through a reification of reductive minutiae. According to Kolpaktchy,

Tandis que l'ancien Grec était, de par sa nature, avide de savoir et curieux de posséder le secret des choses, l'Égyptien se plaisait à contempler les énigmes à l'état initial, à visualiser leur totalité stimulante; il lui répugnait à les disséquer (on ne dissèque que des cadavres), à les creuser, à les fouiller, à étaler en formule abstraite le secret inviolable de l'Etre. L'égyptien aspirait à la *totalité*. Et il voyait *grand*. (35)

It is not altogether true, as Kolpaktchy states, that the Egyptians were not at all interested in analysing individual elements of reality – after all, they also had geometry and knew about the human anatomy, among other branches of knowledge. It is more accurate to state that they did not absolutise elements or minutiae, more interested as they were in the ultimate nature and structure of truth: its wholism. When Kolpaktchy projects Egyptian perspective onto the twentieth (and twenty-first) century critical theory, he upholds the ultimate superiority of Egyptian wisdom and epistemology:

Lequel des deux peuples, des Egyptiens ou des Grecs, avait raison? L'impasse dans laquelle l'humanité civilisée se débat aujourd'hui n'est-elle pas l'héritage du rationalisme grec dégagé progressivement de la mystique égyptienne et retouché par la médiocrité latine? N'eût-il pas mieux valu s'arrêter à mi-chemin, comme les Egyptiens? Car avoir constaté l'existence de l'énigme était déjà beaucoup. (35-36, emphases added)

Kolpaktchy has even more scathing comments on the tradition initiated by Cartesian 'rigour':

L'homme d'aujourd'hui se sent obscurément attiré vers l'ancienne Egypte, terre classique des mystères, et vers cette dialectique, propre au tempérament de ce peuple qui évolue avec virtuosité au milieu d'un cliquetis des antinomies existentielles.... La démesure égyptienne écrase la mesure grecque; elle le fait sans une ombre d'effort.... (36)

Thus, the alterity at issue here – the one which precedes ontology and Western logocentrism – is African. Again, this is not an exhortation to jettison rational thinking altogether; but of having the modesty to realise that science hardly exhausts the awesome complexity of reality and existence. Kolpaktchy links our modern epistemologic impasse to Writing in an interesting contrastive approach which recalls Yates:

Et c'est ainsi que l'Egypte, veuve de toute littérature écrite digne de ce nom, fut considérée par la Grèce – cette Grèce antique que nous admirons tant – comme son initiatrice et son inspiratrice... Pour comprendre l'Egypte – et ses textes mêmes – qu'on écoute d'abord son silence. (56-57, emphasis added)

By contrast, the explosive talkativeness of Western critical theory (say, *à la Derrida*) too often gives it the illusion that it has a definitive grip on reality.¹ With the last quoted statement, Kolpaktchy, like Levinas, enacts an ethics of alterity which is not only compelled to acknowledge the Other, but does so on the Other's terms. It is a humbling conclusion Michael Rice reaches too after years of patiently and painstakingly studying Egypt and Black Africa. Pertinently for us, he too engages the true nature of Egyptian writing, not the nature Derrida, Hegel, and others hastily assigned it:

As with so much associated with the ancient Egyptians, their writing appears at first sight at once familiar and deeply obscure. The form of Egyptian orthography is rooted in the capacity for observation and the love of animal forms enmeshed with a preoccupation with symbolic expression. This had the effect of concealing the deeper reality under a familiar form which would protect that reality from too

ready and unprepared elucidation. As in all societies of a deeply conservative nature determined by hieratic principles, Egyptian forms rarely reveal their true meaning at first glance: they are therefore, to this extent, essentially symbolic and, in a literal sense, occult. (*Legacy*, 198)

It is this redemptive underside of the African Word that the hierophant Armah reveals to the inscribed reader in *Osiris Rising*. Levinas, like Carl Jung, visited and studied Black Africa; and the intellectual interest of much of Levinasian philosophy is, as we have seen, significant.

The debate over the future of Black literary theory begins, therefore, with the double task of liberating the Black sacred and secular texts, as well as Black literary criticism, from the prism or overdetermination of much of High Theory. It begins with a jettisoning of the template of some paradigms of High Theory, through the consolidation and perfection of a Black phenomenological hermeneutics that is up to the task of more adequately representing the depth of African subjectivity in literary theory. Class and gender, for instance, are practical enough categories of Black subjectivity. But, as social forces, such subjectivities can also be anchored in or supplemented with a deeper, non-materialist, structure of subjectivity which ensures that essence is depleted neither by simplistic or absolutist Black materialist formulations of narrative subjectivity in literature, nor by a mainstream template of pronouncements which tries to bait Black literary theory into renouncing its identity. Thanks to the DBSC, the desire of deep Black subjectivity as signified in language undergoes a broadening and deepening as a result of an epistemological mutation in our understanding of the full temporal structure and philosophical depth of Black identity. An additional, recovered, dimension now enables theory to probe the depth of Blackness as mediated in literature. If literary theory can surmount the modernist separation of Black consciousness or body from mystical or divine writing, logocentric writing can be better perceived for the simulacrum it is of Black essence.

In Africa, besides *Osiris Rising*, another fount of essence is, clearly, Soyinka's œuvre. In *MLAW*, and in Soyinka's writing in general, are echoes of Egypt, of traditional Africa before it reached its zenith in Egypt. Soyinka too has been largely indifferent to calls for him to simplify his writing style. Like the other uncompromising mind, Harris, he is unlikely to heed such uninformed requests, judging them inimical to the development of complex theoretic acumen.

Derridian deconstruction is ultimately an African, Egyptian, problematics, because Africa is where to look to both better understand and to more effectually critique it. Pickstock offers a sustained critique of Derrida, though the archetypes and concepts she draws on to do this are not Christian but African, contrary to what the consistently Christian register she deploys might lead the average reader to surmise. There are, therefore, in her book too many silences regarding Africa. We will, as a result, turn to Kolpakchty for one of the most incisive evocations of the problematics of writing. Kolpakchty re-places this problematics in its originary Egyptian context for the twenty-first century reader; and does so more consistently than Ricoeur in his above-mentioned essay:

L'idée qui présidait à l'écriture hiéroglyphique émanait du centre initiatique d'Hermopolis (Khemenu) où le culte de Thoth donna naissance à la doctrine du Verbe divin, du logos créateur et de la magie. La doctrine du Trismégiste montrait le monde visible dans son état figé; mais derrière la sagesse cristallisée et la perfection de la nature soumise aux «lois», elle enseignait la présence de la volonté créatrice des dieux, volonté éteinte, il est vrai, mais dont les traces se voyaient partout. (42, emphases added)

These are the traces *Osiris Rising* tracks and the creative and redemptive nature or potential of Writing it thematises. Ricoeur and others are right in pointing out that Derrida got it wrong, just as Doody is right in suspecting him of having a hidden agenda. Simply put, Derrida has gone from the absolutism he wanted to rectify, to inscribing another extremism, according to various minorities. Such a state of affairs is a reflection of a general, bigger, issue from an African perspective. And this is, again, that virtually

everything (archetypes, schools or forms of art, philosophic concepts, etc) the West has taken from Africa has been overtheorised, over-represented, overdetermined, distorted, misunderstood, only for Western epistemology to suddenly want to return to the African originals. In the process, something interesting happens: the Westerner, unable to understand that Africans do not literally live like their ancient ancestors anymore, is determined, anyway, through a projection of fantasies (a kind of Rousseauist transference) to overidealise Africa. The intention is far from innocent. It is designed to put Africans (and other aboriginal peoples) in a strait-jacket, lock them into antiquity, in order to keep emphasising how "they are not like us," while, at the same time, the West helps itself to anything African (or aboriginal) that can rejuvenate Western culture. Indeed, writing is a 'surrogate' for a more authentic mode of self-apprehension or medium of representation. But it is not the absolute, nihilist, 'Fall' Derrida suggests it is. Senghor and Soyinka have offered us, above, their formulation of a theory of the Sign, of writing; and Armah thematises this Sign in *Osiris Rising*. As a result, there is cause for more optimism, if we believe Kolpaktchy:

Trismégiste disait donc: «Regardez le ciel avec ses étoiles, ses Luminaires, ses nuages; regardez la terre avec ses montagnes, ses fleuves et ses plantes. Tout ceci n'est autre chose que l'expression de la volonté divine, de la pensée divine; le Cosmos tout entier est un Livre cosmique, un manuscrit, un gigantesque rouleau de Papyrus issu des mains des dieux. Cherchez donc à lire et à comprendre ce Livre ouvert et étalé devant vous, cette révélation des dieux».

Ainsi naquirent – de la «langue écrite des dieux» -- les hiéroglyphes égyptiens, ces copies exactes des autres HIEROGLYPHES [sic], tracés ceux-là par la main des dieux sur l'immense Papyrus du Ciel et de la Terre...(42)

We note, in passing, that it is this "Livre cosmique", signatures of the gods, which informs Wilson Harris's fictional world. These are also the same traces and clues Birago Diop and Armah thematise. In his contribution to *The Future of Literary Theory*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. was prepared to go on record for pointing out that Black Americans, or Blacks *tout court*, were practising deconstruction long before Derrida came along:

If only for the record, let me state clearly here that only a black person alienated from black language-use could fail to understand that we have been deconstructing white people's languages and discourses since that dreadful day in 1619 when we were marched off the boat in Virginia. Jacques Derrida did not invent deconstruction; we did! (336)

Though the assertion is right, like Tate, Gates does not seem aware of the necessity or the possibility of intellectually completely reversing the Middle Passage in order to fully substantiate the claim. Yet, Gates too has taken on Derrida as directly as does Doody; for he writes:

The classic critique of our attempt to reconstitute our own subjectivity, as women, as blacks, etc., is that of Jacques Derrida: "This is the risk. The effect of Law is to build a structure of the subject, and as soon as you say, 'well, the woman is a subject and this subject deserves equal rights,' and so on – then you are caught in the logic of phallocentrism and you have rebuilt the empire of Law." To expressions such as this, made by a critic whose stands on sexism and racism have been exemplary, we must respond that the Western male subject has long been constituted historically for himself and in himself. And, while we readily accept, acknowledge, and partake of the critique of *this* subject as transcendent, to deny us the process of exploring and reclaiming our subjectivity before we critique it is the critical version of the grandfather clause, the double privileging of categories that happen to be preconstituted. Such a position leaves us nowhere, invisible and voiceless in the republic of Western letters. (*Loose Canon*, 35-36)

I have pointed out C. A. Diop's mistrust of European philosophy's methodology of disseminating African subjectivity and leaving it open-ended, "suspended" (Pickstock). I have also referred to Doody's reservations, to West's unease at the amount of inordinate intellectual energy Derridians devote to demonstrating the 'glory' of indeterminacy in Derrida's discourse, and to Gates's disappointment at Derrida's 'callousness'. Though it is not primarily defending a minority agenda, Leonard Lawlor's *Imagination and Chance* has the merit of making very concrete and very explicit that which others have faulted Derrida for. Lawlor brings to his differentiation between Ricoeur and Derrida the lucid perspective of a professor of philosophy. He makes the following fine distinction:

Ricoeur and Derrida's similar attempts at conceiving mediation are based on three insights. First, it is absolutely impossible for thought to achieve complete self-knowledge or self-understanding by means of intuitive self-reflection. In other words, subjective idealism in the strictest sense is impossible....Second....it is absolutely necessary for thought to externalize itself in what both Ricoeur and Derrida called signs....in other words, externalization brings about the truth of the original structures of thought. Third and most

importantly, while mediation in signs makes truth possible, it also makes truth impossible. Linguistic mediation postpones the end of "complete mediation" in which the original would be recovered in all its determinations....On the basis of these three insights, both Ricoeur and Derrida oppose the hubris epitomized by Hegelianism: the *hubris* of the completed circle in which difference and alterity are mastered....[Yet,] a barely visible difference exists....With *différance* (to choose one of the many names Derrida gives to mediation) Derrida attempts to articulate mediation as such. This means, on the one hand for Derrida, that mediation is prior to thought or perception. Nonpresence, discontinuity, and difference, then, are prior to presence, continuity, and identity. On the other, it implies for Derrida that when mediation adopts its traditional position in the middle, it does not function merely as a passage from thought back to thought, from present back to present....For Ricoeur, however, distancing (one of the many names he gives to mediation) is a dialectical concept; it attempts to articulate mediation in terms of its origin and end....The barely visible difference between distancing and *différance* unfolds into the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction. Hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, attempts to construct a system out of the diverse ways being is said. This would not be a closed system which would reduce the multiple meanings of being down to strict univocity, but an open system that places diversity, novelty, and surplus within an analogical unity....Hermeneutics then....must be seen as a philosophical project. While hermeneutics opposes the most confining type of metaphysical mastery, it nevertheless attempts to recover Western metaphysics's original project: Aristotle's, Aquinas's, Husserl's, and (in certain respects) even Hegel's thought of reality as an infinitely altering identity organized by a postponed *telos*....Deconstruction....must be seen as something like a perversion of philosophy. If Ricoeur's hermeneutics must be seen as a recovery of the most generous instances of metaphysics, then deconstruction must be conceived as an attempt to be more generous. Deconstruction gives not for the sake of a purpose (of some postponed *telos*), but merely for the sake of the giving. In other words, lacking a horizon, it lets an impossible accident happen. By means of such donations, deconstruction attempts to break a path beyond any analogy of being, any regulated polysemy. It cannot, therefore, be seen as the recovery, return, or repetition of an original project, of some possibility forgotten by the metaphysical tradition....[B]etween distancing and *différance*, is a difference between imagination and chance, between presence and absence, between zigzag circulation and spiraling circularity, and finally between revived philosophy and perverted philosophy...if we do not clarify the difference, an assimilation risks dissipating the powers that hermeneutics and deconstruction separately present, singular powers that ultimately affect how we conceive ethics and politics....While the polemic establishes a clear difference between Ricoeur and Derrida....it never brings to light the basis of this difference. (1-6, *passim*, emphases added)

So much for the philosophical and ethical problems Derrida's discourse constitutes from the point of view of certain identitarian and intellectual projects. In Lawlor's careful distinction, there is still a tension even in his defence of mediation in signs. Ricoeur's 'Neoplatonism' clearly situates him closer (in terms of insight) to Egypt. Yet, in the above- mentioned essay in Valdes's collection, Ricoeur clearly favours writing over

Lawlor's "intuitive self-reflection," Yates's "memory" and Senghor's "intuition", whereas my dissertation argues parity.

It is possible to undermine Derrida's prestige from a minority standpoint; but Gates will have to not only recross the Atlantic more boldly than he has done so far. His search for Africa, unlike Manthia Diawara's, will have to expand beyond the cultural space he covers so well in *The Signifying Monkey* and embrace Egypt. Only then will Gates have a more complete picture or idea of Africa and Black literary theory. Only then will he be able to bring his already proven critical and theoretic acumen to a new, twenty-first century, and Black, fleshing out of the universal significance for literary theory of Thoth's seminal African invention. That which Kolpaktchy only briefly refers to, above (the comprehensive meaning of Thoth's invention) can be elaborated on and channelled into giving a new and lucid direction to Black literary theory, away from the confusions Derrida and overzealous Derridians enmeshed it in. In the same essay in Ralph Cohen's *The Future of Literary Theory*, Gates's concluding remark reads: "we must also know and test the dark secrets of a black and hermetic discursive universe that awaits its disclosure through the black arts of interpretation. For the future of theory, in the remainder of this century, is black, indeed" (346). Provocative as the claim may sound, it is true; though Gates and other Black theorists need a new theory of ontologic intersubjectivity (between Africa and the diaspora) in order to more effectually refute the claim of the non-existence of a Black theoretic tradition. One way to image the new kind of Black theorist I am discussing is to construe him or her as the ill-informed inscribed reader in *Osiris Rising*, and do so through a process of transvaluation according to which fictional truth is imitated by literary theory in its formulation of a new ethics of alterity. Such an approach does not just juxtapose fiction and theory and stays detached. Instead, it actively suggests a fecund interrelatedness. It is in this sense that *Osiris Rising* helps the theorist pose his/her critical or theoretic acts more appropriately. For

Hountondji to, in effect, simply shrug his shoulders at Hegel's excesses, is already to concede a lot; to take too much for granted by falling for or dignifying Hegel's claim of a privileged Judeo-Christian uniqueness. This is because in reality Hegel already includes Egypt, the cradle of spiritual wisdom. The DBSC, related schools of thought, and *Osiris Rising* hone our awareness of the elaborate, expanded, tenacious, conceptual equipment needed to come to this realisation about Hegelian philosophy. In Kolpaktchy's words:

Toute la dialectique d'Héraclite et – deux millénaires plus tard – celle d'Hegel, voilà le substrat et l'axe de cristallisation de la Weltanschauung égyptienne; et c'est, pour nous, l'élément le plus précieux de son apport spirituel. (36)

Diop too sees Hegel in a much longer genealogy: "With the appearance of the demiurge, Ra, Egyptian cosmology takes a new direction with the introduction of the an idealist component: Ra achieves creation through the word (Islam and Judeo-Christian religions), the *logos* (Heraclitus), the spirit (the objective idealism of Hegel)" (*Civilization*, 311). Before Hegel, was Heraclitus; and before Heraclitus, was ancient Egypt. According to Freke and Gundy in *The Jesus Mysteries*, "the works of Heraclitus were renowned even in ancient times for being obscure and impenetrable, yet Diogenes explains that they are crystal clear to an initiate of the [Egyptian] Mysteries" (21). Egypt has been reborn several times in the history of ideas, including in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Yet, according to Hegel's deliberately crude reading of Egyptian religion in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, it was a religion of nature, below and to be separated from the "religion of beauty...of the Greeks...and the religion of sublimity [of the Jews]" (327).

James A. Snead was initially optimistic about how deconstruction was going to indirectly help deracialise and decolonise philosophy and literary theory. However, he later realised how, due to its genealogy in the history of thought, deconstruction was/is, at bottom, suspect. In the chapter "Racist Traces in Postmodernist Theory and

Literature" in his posthumously published book *Racist Traces and Other Writings*, Snead goes from the position that "Deconstruction [will detect and dismantle] the often repressive ways and usages of wider social systems," (136) to the realisation that Derrida's prioritisation of textualism was at the expense of race, among other concepts:

One might suggest that the status of the work of Derrida and others as 'in the tradition of Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, etc.' is signified, if by nothing else, then by their avoidance of any significant reference to black or Third World conceptual systems. He reads the Western tradition against itself, relying heavily on the great sirens of Eurocentrism: Hegel, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, de Saussure. Yet even those sources use blackness in one form or another, usually as negative examples. Their anti-black bias appears, then, in Derrida, not as blatant racism, but as the absence of reference to race. (143)²

Snead's decision to revisit deconstruction stems from the desire to point out a number of ironies in the history of philosophy and literary theory. Like E. San Juan, Jr., he sees poststructuralism as essentially the West's revenge on more ancient modes of being and thought, an anxiety of influence which causes the West to turn on the same cultures it draws from and destroy them, at least discursively, in order to justify its claim that the Other does not have a culture (Fanon). Here, for example, is Snead's reading of Levi-Strauss' moves vis-à-vis the Other:

It is, indeed, out of white perplexity at non-Western semiotics that many of the basic concepts of modern cultural anthropology were forged. The real mentor of the postmodernist movement, Levi-Strauss, is a direct descendant of this nineteenth-century effort to make sense out of the "savage" mind.... Staying within the Western conceptual model would not have given [Levi-Strauss] as explicitly the raw material he needed for certain insights...[However,] Levi-Strauss' meditation on non-Western thinking models soon turns into a vivid demonstration of the superiority of the white mind. (139-140)

In her introduction to Snead's book, Kara Keeling points out another irony detected by Snead (3-4). In his article "On Repetition in Black Culture", which had appeared in H. L. Gates' *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Snead had pointed out Hegel's disparaging belief in the African's lack of self-consciousness, in his belief of the African being always already there, stagnant; whereas the thinking, evolving European was headed there. Kara writes:

According to Snead, the importance for contemporary thinking of Hegel's reading of Black culture lies in its accuracy: 'Hegel was almost entirely correct in his reading of black culture, but what he could not have guessed was that in his very criticism of it he had almost perfectly described the 'there' to which European culture was 'headed.' For Snead, much of contemporary culture and philosophy indicates that 'there' is now 'here' and that European culture has arrived at African culture. That recognition is accompanied in our time by much moaning and gnashing of teeth in the form of theoretical musings about the end of History, the death of the Subject, and the fragmentation of the master narrative. What has been neglected in all the wailing is the fact that there exists a body of thought, including literature and other cultural productions, which has engaged with these "poststructuralist" phenomena for at least a century. (4)

The African cultures which have meditated on human nature and truth for millennia did know about uncertainty; but they did not reify it into an absolutism. Snead's conviction that deconstruction is mostly flawed when applied to Blackness results in part from a historicisation of Derrida that arrives at different conclusions from those of Mark C. Taylor's contextualisation of deconstruction. To Snead:

One cannot borrow as heavily from Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Herder as Derrida does without coming to terms with their tricky and often limited definitions of "humanness." They may have arrived at racist definitions of blackness, too, but at least they did not benignly neglect the issue of race altogether. (practice the racism of benign neglect). (142)

Traces of racism partly mean the absence of Africa in Derrida. I contend that Derrida's deliberate misreading of the myth of Thoth (Pickstock) – to be connected to Hegel's own reading, according to Hare -- is an example of the elision of the racial Other in his philosophy of language.

In 1987, Michael Thelwell asked:

How is it that so many writers of the Black World—men and women who in their private and public discourse seem wondrously clear on questions of history and imperialism...seem to become totally recolonized when they sit down to write fiction? Why, in so many cases, do they either not see an alternative or not feel a need to avoid adopting Western modes, Western perspectives, even Western biases.

One can only conclude that the literary recolonization of black writers—a colonization of style, purpose, implied audience, literary concern, and intention—is possible only to the extent that we do not subject Western literary myths and assumptions to the same searching scrutiny we give their political motives, interests, actions, and rhetoric. Yet, in fact, the relationship between the two is close—even symbiotic—and certainly their ancestry is the same. (*Duties*, 227-228)

To us, Thelwell's point is that fictional truth can thematise an epistemological mutation which is then transvaluated into literary theory's discourse on the adequate representation of Blackness. In spite of Thelwell's perceptive observation, he did not, as a Black writer of the diaspora, have the required radical onto-epistemological heritage onto which to firmly ground his implied project. Armah not only does, but the consciously Pan-African thrust of *Osiris Rising* thematises a new and extended African and Black diaspora intersubjectivity. More closely to Thelwell's concerns, Armah's novel reverses the Western novel's two-dimensional representation of reality and Blackness. To say that various forms of Western discourse are racist is not enough. New Black literary theory needs to contest, address the question of the very origin of the archetypes and concept-metaphors which underpin Western literature and, from the understanding of how these myths and metaphors were originally intended to work, formulate a counterdiscourse, instead of enacting a riposte mostly from within the epistemological legacy handed it by the Enlightenment and modernism. To merely protest is one thing; to actually integrate new insight into one's conceptual grid in order to bring about an epistemological mutation requires deeper thinking. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has been, unquestionably, one of the most consequential literary theorists in the Black tradition this century. In his above prospection of the hermetic structures of Black signs, the desire to probe wide and deep is unmistakable. Yet, there is no indication as to where to dig. We can, therefore, image Jehwty as having held Armah's hand and pen and guided him through the process of writing *Osiris Rising*. Without killing Armah the author, the divine writer talked him out of the superficiality of operating within what is essentially both a realist and modernist mode, and convinced him to visit a largely neglected site or narrative protocol.

Being Whole, Seeing Whole, in Fiction and Art-Theory: Jean Toomer

On the issue of being, seeing, and writing whole as an effect of ancient ancestral muses, a few comments on Toomer's sense of the relation between literature and other elements of (Black) culture may be in order here. In what may be considered a summative comment, Byrd expresses a morality of art familiar to Africans and Blacks when he writes:

Toomer never supported the view of art for art's sake, and his experiences during the Gurdjieff period only reinforced his opposition to what he perceived as narrow, self-indulgent, self-centered aesthetics. Having passed through the fire of the Gurdjieff teachings whole and purified, or so he thought, Toomer believed now more than ever before that art possessed a specific use and function. "If art," he asked, "does not promote human development in those who produce it and in those who receive it, of what use art?" In Toomer's view, art was a grand and in some ways holy mechanism for engendering growth and development. Art was a means to larger being and higher consciousness for the artist and for society. (86)

Toomer's achievement in *Cane* and in life may not be insignificant after all. The mystical ideal may seem to elude the characters in *Cane*, but it is not unachievable. Such an observation leads us back to literary theory. I have been trying to show in this dissertation that ancient modes of being are amenable to a present-day metalinguistic elucidation and enrichment of Black philosophy and literary theory.

The combination of a harmonious consciousness, a totally honest humanism, and a literary theory that systematises this insight, is a balance Black literature has always tried to strike. To return to mythochronology again, I am suggesting that before Toomer and Gurdjieff, this ethos inspired men and women of good will in ancient Africa. And so, I have tried to foreground and emphasise the African antecedent one discerns even in Toomer, something most readings do not do. In contrast to those who are suspiciously a little too eager to deracialise Toomer, I say that it is even better to historicise this African element in his works. To do so would not take anything away from Toomer's profoundly humanist and universalist outlook and his unquestionable

artistic talent; it would, I believe, enhance them instead. Toomer did speak favourably of his mixed ancestry. But he was equally confident about what Blackness meant to him, though white America did not make it easy for him to feel this way about Blackness. What Senghor and Toomer have in common is that both have a clear sense of human evolution from Africa; and both (Senghor more explicitly than Toomer) realise that it was Africa's destiny to be the originator of much that has benefited human civilisation. As a result, their argument about how mixed races are is directed at the fallacy of white purity. It was Africa's destiny to be at the forefront of civilisation. Toomer implies this in the above quotation about races and evolution being traceable to Africa; but Senghor makes it very explicit. Therefore, those who like to background Toomer's Blackness are guilty of oversimplification. Senghor's collection of essays can help them reinterpret Toomer. On this point, it is significant that the animist African Senghor empathised with and translated some of Toomer's works into French. If indeed Toomer was a believer in eugenics (another argument avid deracialisers of Toomer have used), the explanation would be that because American slavery often did not bring out the best in the slaves, Toomer and others, in despair, succumbed, at least momentarily, to eugenics as a solution. Yet, all this makes my decision to feature Toomer in my thesis more interesting. Behind the sheer brutality against the Black slaves, behind Hegel's anti-African invectives, and behind Western academia's continuing testiness (as noted by Hare and others) about the Africa-Egypt debate, is a secret deep enough to make the West feel agitated privately: Africa as the source of much that has gone into building Western civilisation. Richard Poe's book details these unacknowledged African/Egyptian elements in American culture. Here now is Robert J. C. Young on how Europe and America went about resolving the deep-seated contradiction – and eugenics is one of the main ideas in this section of Young's book. He writes in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*:

Increasingly [,] definitions of what Western culture was required racial differentiation. The equation of the white race with civilization (and...of civilization as the cause of whiteness) makes it clear why it was so important during the nineteenth century for the Egyptians not to have been black: this gives a more immediate context and specific rationale for Bernal's argument in *Black Athena* that in the nineteenth century there was a concerted effort to turn the civilization of ancient Egypt from a black one to a white one, than his suggestion of a general conspiracy of European racism. Although Bernal does not discuss them, in fact, as we shall see, the most ardent proponents of the white Egypt thesis were Americans seeking to defend the institution of slavery in the American South. (95)

Circumstances may have forced Toomer to foresee the death of rural African-American culture 'in the modern desert.' However, a rebirth of an Afro-American culture that is, in a sense, more consequential where power relations are concerned (i. e. the intellectual one), is underway; for much of the essence of the rural "souls of black folk" has gone into the reinvention/re-articulation of Black identity that the DBSC proffers. For example, like Diop, above, in his reference to the need to reformulate the foundations of African classics, Reed, in *Conversations With Ishmael Reed* acknowledges the periodic necessity of identity-reformulation as it helps lay the (trans-Atlantic) foundations of Black literature. According to Reed:

One wants to go back to the matrix [as the character Ast does], see the power of it and how it influences contemporary usage. I do not think you can understand African American religion without going back to that source. Translating [religious texts written in Yoruba that one finds in Africa and the Black diaspora] and looking at the literature is very revealing. You have a literature that is epic like Ulysses. (375)

In my quotations of Toomer, I have underlined or drawn attention to certain words, concepts, ideas, etc. These are indicators that one can more systematically locate in Toomer's entire oeuvre and taxonomise them in order to further posit a possible African grounding of his fictional and essayistic worlds. In closing, it is instructive to remember Senghor's point, above, that there is a sense in which modernist aesthetics is Black African aesthetics, especially as this aesthetics was practised in the United States. Consider the following aesthetic and identitarian position by Toomer, as quoted by Byrd:

" In so far as the old folk-songs, syncopated rhythms, the rich sweet taste of dark

skinned life, in so far as these are Negro, I am, body and soul, Negroid" (58). It sounds familiar; for compare it to the following related aesthetic and Pan-Africanist identitarian statement by Senghor:

Lorsque les Nègres furent déportés, par millions, de leur continent aux Amériques, ils n'emportèrent apparemment que des haillons. Ils emportèrent, avec eux, l'essentiel: leurs richesses intérieures, culturelles, dont le plain-chant et la polyphonie ne furent pas les moindres. C'est ainsi que les fameux *negro spirituals* et *blues* des Nègro-Américains sont en plain-chant polyphonique. (134)

Though Toomer's claim of a particular racial identity does complicate one's idea of that identity, this does not mean that hasty deracialisers like Byrd should feel entitled to minimise the significance of Toomer's Blackness and, in effect, want to have us endorse only their particular hybridist thesis. More important here for us, is the idea of "richesses intérieures" which, in music, literature (*Cane*), and other Black art-forms, is brought into an adequation of content and form toward the same ideal of seeing whole that I referred to above.

Mary Lefkowitz and Other New Deniers

After centuries of mostly sterile and futile logocentric agitation intended to 'coopt' various alterities into a neutralising homogeneity/integration, Western philosophy may now have to acknowledge the Other on its own terms. As far as religion is concerned, those who acknowledge the need to reread the history of religion but cannot bring themselves to consistently acknowledge Egypt's significance include Pickstock, Kolpaktchy, and even Stephen R. Haynes. Haynes interrogates Christianity but maintains it as the paradigm within which the Black subject should continue to pose its concerns; and in spite of his enthusiasm for ancient Egypt as a necessary calibration of absolutist rationalism, Kolpaktchy, at times, affirms a superiority of Christianity, mainly due to what appears to be his literalist reading of the Bible. Mary Lefkowitz represents the classic Western classicist where the debate over history is concerned. There is a

good amount of hysteria in her *Not Out Of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. In her tendency to dismiss virtually every Afrocentric claim, there is a wilfulness on her part to simplify the complex nature of the issues. In this book, she questions Diop's reference to Diodorus's favourable account of Egyptian influence on Greece (16-17). Often, she does not deny that the Greeks themselves admit to Egyptian influence; she just does not think they knew what they were doing...

(55). This patronising attitude is repeated in the book. For example, she writes:

Some Afrocentrists assume that the Greek historians had access to reliable information about ancient Egypt, and that the account of Greek writers can be regarded as literally true. But....I shall explain why in this matter the Greek writers are not as trustworthy as they claim to be. I will suggest instead that they were eager to establish direct links between their civilization and that of Egypt because Egypt was a vastly older culture, with elaborate religious customs and impressive monuments. (55)

The attempt by her and her fellow classicists to rein in at all cost even Greek accounts of themselves shows that to her, modern conservative classical studies is the version of Egyptian and Greek relationships. To point out that all this Westerncentric fiat amounts to effrontery, is not to overstate our case against Lefkowitz and her admirers. She contests virtually all claims (Western, African, Black) of Greek borrowing and of the Blackness of Egyptians. Her essay "A Fable of Our Time: The Destructive Legacy of Black Athena" is a repetition of this oversimplification. In a subsequent issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*, and in his book, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals*, even Jacques Berlinerblau shows how many of Lefkowitz's own arguments are as lacking in moderation as those of the Afrocentrists she is denouncing.³ By contrast, due to the intractability of some of the issues on ancient history (also pointed out by Berlinerblau), in discussing Diop's work, Francois-Xavier Fauvelle treads cautiously. Unlike Lefkowitz and others, Fauvelle believes it is difficult to say conclusively whether Diop's theses are untrue. For this reason, he says, he chooses to focus on the methodological and

rhetorical aspects of Diop's entire oeuvre; he scrutinises how Diop moves from one premise to another:

Récusant toute autorité, et incapable en outre (n'étant ni égyptologue, ni linguiste, ni anthropologue) de nous prononcer sur le fond, nous nous installons dans l'oeuvre de Diop moins intéressé aux énoncés qu'à leur production.... Nous ne jugerons pas les faits mais mettrons seulement au jour l'organisation de l'ensemble du dispositif diopien, sa trame, son ossature. (19)

Fauvelle goes further. For though he is not at all out to shower Diop with unearned praise, he urges academia and the reader to ponder one possibility: "Et si Diop avait raison, envers et contre tout?" (18). Fauvelle's cautiousness makes him a more trustworthy Western critic of Diop than the likes of Lefkowitz. For, indeed, what if it turns out Diop is right? What if a lot of what is passed off as authoritative Judeo-Christian, Western, ancient history and religion is inaccurate, and deliberately so? What if history proves Bernal right when, on the flap of Poe's book, he confidently predicts (in 1997): "I am convinced that within 20 years Richard Poe's views will be seen as closer to the historical truth than those of the present defenders of the status quo." It is fair to say that the status quo has already lost much of its edge. Hence the position my thesis argues of the link between the decolonisation of historiography that should also see the detotalisation of literary theory.

Lefkowitz operates in a tradition of intellectual production currently on the defence. Unable to calmly and methodically refute the arguments of a school like the DBSC and of an increasing number of sympathising Western academics, Lefkowitz turns on a vulnerable discourse like Afrocentricity which to her is nothing but outright goofy scholarship. With less sensationalism, she could begin to see that the conservative ground she stands on is not as firm as she obstinately thinks. Lefkowitz's colleagues in academia, and those outside it like ABC News's republican-minded George Will, on the pages of *Newsweek* magazine, may not be doing her a favour by continuing to call her an erudite scholar.

Where literary history is concerned, Geddes MacGregor is an interesting case. In the chapter entitled "Biblical Literature and Creative Power" in his *A Literary History of the Bible*, he indicates:

I venture to suggest that the vitality of the Bible is so prodigious that it has an ineluctable literary force on all who come within even shouting distance of its enchantments. Its effects do not in the least necessarily depend upon any particular exegesis or midrash; they are independent of all doctrinal interpretations and every confessional stance. (387)

While the value of the Bible for world literature is undeniable, MacGregor is, clearly, assuming too much here with his disavowal of the ideological baggage of the biblical text. Almost contradicting himself, he comments on "the understanding of English and American literature that every English-speaking child should have" (388), and points out that without a knowledge of the Bible, Anglo-American literature would be for the child or student 'difficult or even impossible of comprehension'. If this is so, the Bible's and MacGregor's neutrality is unsustainable when biblical literature is exported to the non-Christian world. Yet, MacGregor still does not appear ready to appreciate this, for he writes:

When the Bible came to Egypt and Syria, for example, the Coptic and Syrian languages had ceased to have any literary existence since the days of Alexander the Great. With the Bible they took a new lease on life and a new kind of life. From a purely literary standpoint they were reborn. (384)

Again, one readily acknowledges the spiritual depth and literary value of the Bible. However, what MacGregor fails to see is that from a Black, DBSC, perspective, for example, the Bible is a very ideological text on account of the particular fact that it denies its own full time and genealogy. By the time MacGregor's Bible reached him and Christendom, it had accumulated a whole lot of non Judeo-Christian and, therefore, non-Western baggage; a debt it is reluctant to acknowledge in its full extent. It is partly out of this awareness that various minorities (including feminists worldwide, we might add) have rewritten many Western literary classics to make aesthetic, but ideological, statements

that revise the image of Blackness, aboriginal North American Indian identity, womanliness, etc., in the Bible and in canonic literature.

The Black Absence in Jean-Michel Rabaté's Future of Literary Theory

Finally, as far as literary theory and its future are concerned, Rabaté is among the current literary theorists who still resent change. In order to make the position of the white male still look entirely tenable, Rabaté resorts to oversimplifying and misrepresenting the positions of various Others on literary theory. He writes:

One gathers that Theory's bad name is blamed on deconstruction: deconstruction would have begun the splintering process leading to all subsequent assertions of the marginal in the name of alterity – whether the responsibility of embodying otherness falls to women, ethnic minorities, gays, lesbians, subalterns of any type, emerging cultures caught before any Westernization. All the hyphenated citizens, all the disenfranchised of the world, can join in the fray; as the excluded ones they have to be recuperated and promoted as crucial exceptions to the rule, in an endless game articulating center and margins, well described by Derrida as early as 1966. Not only is the move dangerously regressive because it forces us to rely on identity politics, but potentially absurd – the hyphenation process is virtually endless. I am always more than just Irish-American-Polish or Franco-Belgian-Jewish. How far back should we go, or how many grandparents each endowed with special virtues can we boast, if we want to account for our uniquely specialized idiosyncrasies? (144)

One gets the impression that Rabaté has never heard about slavery, colonialism, the extermination of various aboriginal cultures, neocolonialism, paternalism, etc. In short, he does not appear to have ever heard of various forms of biodeterminism and how even literary theory encodes them. Rabaté's nostalgia for the days of unbridled white male authority in literary theory is obvious. But Doody makes the likes of him look obsolete when, referring to Margaret Atwood, she intimates the quickly changing topography of literary theory:

The early twenty-first century will have some reasons to wish to elaborate on rather than suppress the vision of the Goddess or the Divine as Female. The influences pressing towards this vision are behind novelists like Atwood and Robbins, who paint their Goddess in such defiantly bold strokes. No longer need Venus hover in a nineteenth-century manner as a bronze figurine; she is once

more getting up and walking (or gliding) towards us: *vera incessu patuit dea*.
(*The True Story*, 466)

Rabaté's central argument is one we are familiar with:

What matters above all is the rigor of one's critical discourse, since it cannot be defined by an object, be it "material" as with drafts, archives, or variants, or more obviously constructed as when we talk of gender, race, or communities. Such rigor will then create a rhetorical space that will make its terms available and debatable for a wider interpretive community. (143)

He is being disingenuous here by oversimplifying the stance of minorities and by arguing a tenuous strict neutrality of critical discourse. The intellectual rigour he claims is lacking in the Others' theoretic discourse is already part of the theoretic tools of Black literary theory, to take one minority example; and the DBSC and *Osiris Rising* have just given this rigour a boost.

Given the conservative tenor of Rabaté's idea of literary history, it is not surprising to see instances of silence and omission in his account. He promises to "sketch a genealogy of the cultural developments that led to the inauguration of High Theory in the 1960s, with the hope that the knowledge gained may have implications for the future" (17). He quickly finds himself discussing the similarity between the structure of Surrealism and that of truly original scientific insight as pointed out by Lacan. To Rabaté, it is a similarity which

reawakens the avant-gardist hope, already played out by the Surrealists, of finding in hysteria not only the prime mover which originally set psychoanalysis into motion, but also a principle of inner contradiction preventing the discourse of psychoanalysis from reaching a premature closure by opting for reductive scientism. (18)

Then follows his assertion regarding literary theory that:

the main hystericizing effect of Theory has been in relation to its most immediate other discipline, philosophy. This is where we will need to examine a little more closely Lacan's assertionthat Hegel was the "most sublime of all hysterics"....The remark does not imply that Hegel was a hysteric himself, but that his philosophy provides the template for the discourse of the Hysteric. (19)

Since by "hysteria" Rabaté means Surrealism, I have pointed out, referring to Kolpakchty, the very ancient African, pre-Hegelian, manifestations of Surrealist ontology.

There is, therefore, strictly speaking, a mixing up of chronology in genealogy when Rabaté says: "The impact of Surrealism and all its splinter groups helped rediscover Hegel in the 1930s, above all because he allowed these writers to engage with history, a concern also heightened by the long flirtation of Hegelianism and Marxism" (24). It would have been more interesting if European Surrealism had led to the Black African antecedent (to which Blachère's book is partially devoted) and Egyptian antecedent of the Hegelian template of 'hysterical' figuration. My real point here is about Surrealism and the 1960s identified by Rabaté as the inception of High Theory. Though Rabaté's move to link the emergence of Surrealism to the beginning of High Theory incidentally confirms my belief that very ancient African modes of consciousness be explored for insight on the future of Black literary theory, Rabaté, not surprisingly, is giving only a mainly French and European account of Surrealism, leaving out its non-European provenance and the role played in the movement in France by non-European artists and intellectuals. The scant space Rabaté devotes to a central movement like Surrealism is suspicious. When one reads "La Révolution de 1889 et la Civilisation de l'Universel," the chapter which concludes Senghor's *Ce Que Je Crois*, one realises the extent to which Rabaté minimises, in fact completely leaves out, the significance, in France and Europe, of non-European Surrealism in modernist poetics (Senghor, 212-213). This non-European factor is what, referring to Rimbaud, Senghor calls "l'esthétique du XXe siècle, qui n'est rien d'autre que l'esthétique négro-africaine, qu'il s'agisse de poésie ou de musique, d'art plastique ou de danse" (212). Another point is that in light of Senghor's account of the 1889 revolution in intellectual and artistic thought—a revolution triggered, according to him, by Henri Bergson's *Essai sur les Données immédiates de la Conscience* and Paul Claudel's *Tête d'Or* (209-210)--; and in light of his assertion that "plus que Claudel, qui, à travers Rimbaud, a surtout retenu l'inspiration, ce sont les poètes surréalistes qui ont subi l'influence de la poésie négro-africaine" (215), Rabaté

may have to expand (Doody, 466) his account and at least slightly revise his implied claim that the 1960s beginning of High Theory was an all-white phenomenon. If he does not, new Black literary theory will do it for him. More candidly, Doody is right in connecting the politics of literary criticism to racism; and in the above-quoted essay featured in *Criticism and the Color Line*, Toni Morrison is as realistic when she clearly identifies what is at stake in literary criticism:

The present turbulence seems not to be about the flexibility of a canon, its range among and between Western countries, but about its miscegenation. The word is informative here and I do mean its use. A powerful ingredient in this debate concerns the incursion of third-world or so-called minority literature into a Eurocentric stronghold. When the topic of third world culture is raised, unlike the topic of Scandinavian literature, for example, a possible threat to and implicit criticism of the reigning equilibrium is seen to be raised as well. (19-20)

The Egyptian Weltanschauung and the Future of Black Literary Theory

I have tried to show what is at stake for Black literary theory in the acrimonious row over the perceived Black Africa-Egypt-Greece axis. This approach has seemed necessary, for Western racism against Black Africans actually began as soon as Champollion le Jeune deciphered the hieroglyphics in 1822 and the West, awe-stricken by the beauty and depth of Egyptian wisdom, and acknowledging it as the origin of all other civilisations, decided to de-Africanise and purge it of all Black African traces. Finally, out of my ultimately literary interests in this dissertation, I would like to draw attention to the full import of Kolpaktchy's rearticulation of the genealogy of Hegelian discourse above. The closing phrase in Kolpaktchy's statement reads: " et c'est, pour nous, l'élément le plus précieux de son apport spirituel" (36, emphasis added). And I say, " la Weltanschauung égyptienne est, pour nous africains et noirs, l'élément le plus précieux de son apport à la théorie littéraire." One says this, not at all out of chauvinism, but in a

well-ordered spirit of a genuine universal humanism which can truly begin only after the excluded Black Other is reinstated to its right place in chronology or genealogy. Ethnic (Black) and evolutionary factors which enable a new genealogy/history of ideas are important since, for us, an understanding of philosophy and literary theory is incomplete without an awareness of these racial and temporal factors.

Notes

Introduction

1. "Double-consciousness" in Black fictional and critical discourses is about identity. It is about the mediation of and attempt to reconcile the hyphenated Black subjectivity. Though more readily and more intensely associated with African-American identity, it should also apply to "Afro-Caribbean", "Afro-Latino", "anglophone African", "francophone African", etc. As a constant in Black discourse, it therefore has implications for strategies of textual representation. Yet, to over-emphasise this duality by suggesting that it means the utter unrepresentability of identity or consciousness is to indulge in some of the extremes postmodernism/textualism has been accused of. This is because, concepts such the historicity of the text, race, and similar identitarian notions are still viable enough to make divided consciousness real but subservient to various ways the racial subject can still position itself in a way that works. Thus, to those who feel more Black than anything else, double-consciousness cannot be unduly prioritised. Therefore, the refiguration of race or Blackness defended by such thinkers as K. Anthony Appiah, James Gilroy, to name just a few, is instructive, but one that many are wary of the suggestion that even positive essentialism is an illusion.

2. On the uneasy position of the Black intellectual, also see George Elliott Clarke's "The Treason of the Black Intellectuals?," (Working Paper of the Third Annual Seagram Lecture, Presented on November 4, 1998, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada).

3. "Western High Theory" is here meant in the regular sense of forms of

poststructuralist theory which interrogate basic concepts of European modernism. However, because, when applied to Africa and Blackness in general, even "modernism" does not mean the same thing it means to the Westerner, even modernism is also, by association, being criticised.

4. Though in *New Dimensions in African History* Yosef ben-Jochannan discusses Black identity through a discussion of the Bible and African/Egyptian religious symbolism, his book does not also deal with Africa and Blackness in philosophy, which is of more immediate interest to my ultimate literary theoretic focus. His approach is closer to that of historians of religion.

5. Initially Pan-Africanism or pan-Africanism was (still is, to some) a project that sought to unite all African states into a federation; a home to which the African diaspora could return. Of more interest to us is the literary and artistic idea of Pan-Africanism that also tries to bring together Africans and people of African descent.

6. Ben-Jochannan's book partly discusses these issues too.

7. Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* came to characterise modernism, and this was because Western scholarship prioritised the version of 'detached scepticism', to be completely opposed to mysticism, as the dominant trait of modernist thought. As a result, cultures peripheral to the West (and even women in general) were deemed to be outside. It is a self-Other dialectic. Africa and Blacks fared far worse, as I show above. Slavery had existed before, and mostly outside Africa: white on white, Arab on Arab, etc.; and money was not involved. With European and Arab slavery in Africa, for the first time human beings offered money to buy fellow humans. This is what is unique about the history of Black people.

8. For a very scientific demonstration of how Descartes was simply wrong on many counts about the workings of the human psyche, see Antonio R. Damasio's

Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain, New York, Avon Books, 1994.

9. This is a position Richard Rorty defends in "Response to Michael Williams," in Robert B. Brandon (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics*, Malden, Blackwell, 2000, p. 215.

10. The particular interest of Théophile Obenga's *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*, which I will cite, is that it refers to and quotes, in Greek, a variety of original ancient Greek texts and sources which seem to acknowledge Greece's debt to Egypt. The evidence looks convincing. If these are indeed Greek acknowledgements, then they pose a problem for those who continue to deny a substantial Egyptian influence. For, assuming Greece was unique and culturally self-sufficient, the same Greeks must have, inexplicably, been an insecure bunch indeed for so many of their thinkers to acknowledge so much Egyptian influence on the formative stage of their culture.

11. According to her "It is the Eastern peoples—*les Orientaux*—who show to the fullest extent the human capacities for quickness of thought, speech, and imagination, and it is these qualities, put best to use first by 'les Orientaux' that gave us our novel, of which the first practitioners were largely Syrians, Persians, Egyptians and so on." (17)

12. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (corrected edition), Gayatri C. Spivak (trans.), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1997, p. 7.

13. Ibid., p. 55. Also see Searle's *The Mystery of Consciousness*, New York, The New York Review of Books, 1997; *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; *Consciousness and Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002

14. Paget Henry, "African and Afro-Caribbean Existential Philosophies", in Lewis R. Gordon (ed.), *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, p. 35. Though Henry's Pan-African approach to existentialism is pertinent, what he says about destiny is a simplification. African

philosophy is much more nuanced in examining of such matters. Similarly, Angela Davis's book (quoted above) is to a certain extent exotic in its apprehension of African belief systems in the Americas. In fairness to her, the practitioners of the exotic understanding of these beliefs are the problem, more than Davis the observer. In the diaspora, Ishmael Reed is among those who have a less exotic understanding of African spiritual continuities in the Americas.

15. On the rather tricky concepts of hybridisation, discontinuity, and racelessness, Robert J. C. Young writes in *Colonial Desire*: "Hybridization as creolization involves fusion, the creation of a new form, which can then be set against the old form, of which it is partly made up. Hybridization as 'raceless chaos' by contrast, produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha's restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the perennial revolution of forms." (25).

16. Nicolas Guillen, 'Son numero 6' in *Obra poetica*, tomo 1, La Havana, Instituto cubano del libro, 1972, p. 231; as quoted and translated by Femi Ojo-Ade, "De origen africano, soy cubano: African Elements in the Literature of Cuba," *African Literature Today*, Vol. 9, London, Heinemann, 1978, p. 52.

17. A detailed reading of *Osiris Rising* will be taken up separately: A. Lassissi Odjo, *Ayi Kwei Armah and the Art of Memory*.

18. Madhava Prasad, "On the Question of a Theory of (Third) World Literature," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (eds.), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 141-163. Also of interest in the volume, Manthia Diawara's "Reading Africa through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject," pp. 457-467. On francophone postcolonial theory's nuanced position on the identity and viability of postcolonial theory, see Jean-Marc Moura's *Littératures Francophones et Théorie Postcoloniale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1999. For a specific francophone African

historicisation of postcolonial theory, see Samba Diop (ed. and introduction), *Fictions Africaines et Postcolonialisme*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2002.

Chapter 1

1. See Pathé F. Diagne's insider's account of Diop's life when Senghor was the President of Senegal, in *L'Europolosophie*.

2. In *In My Father's House*, Appiah suggests this when he argues:

It would be difficult to give an exhaustive list of the problems that have come to be at the core of the Western tradition. But they can all, I think, be seen as growing out of a history of systematic reflection on widespread, prereflective beliefs about the nature of humankind, about the purposes, and about our knowledge of and our place in the cosmos. When these beliefs are not subjected to systematic and critical analysis we speak of "folk philosophy." But in Western academic philosophy—by contrast, for example, with anthropology or the history of ideas—what is required is not just a concern with the issues that are the topic of folk philosophy but a critical discourse, in which reason and argument play a central role.

We cannot, however, characterize philosophy simply as the discourse that applies to our folk beliefs the techniques of logic and reason. Not only because others—in physics and sociology and literary theory—make such arguments too, but because academic philosophy has come to be defined by a canon of subjects as well as by its argumentative method. If we understand "philosophy" as the tradition to which Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Hume, Kant and Hegel belong, then at least the following concepts are bound to be regarded as central to that canon: beauty, being, causation, evil, God, gods, good, illusion, justice, knowledge, life, meaning, mind, person, reality, reason, right, truth, understanding, and wrong. (86-87)

Besides Obenga, Senghor in *Ce Que Je Crois* (1988), and Diagne in *L'Europolosophie face à la pensée du négro-Africain* (1981), would not quite agree with Appiah's sense of the full history of philosophy and his suggestion that the concepts he lists were not in the past debated in a manner that was rigorous enough.

3. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (MLAW) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 97. On race in prehistory, antiquity, and ancient Africa, also see Malika Hachid, *Le Tassili des Ajjer: Aux sources de l'Afrique 50 siècles avant les pyramides*, Paris, Editions Paris-Méditerranée, 1998; Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University

Press, 1998; Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Malden/Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1998; J. A. Rogers, *Nature Knows No Color-Line*, Helga M. Rogers, USA, 1952; Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, London/New York, Routledge, 1990; Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1985; Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*, Cambridge and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1966

Chapter 2

1. On how Derrida's move to bracket off so much in the genealogy of ideas is fairly representative of Western philosophy's half-measure approach in acknowledging the Other, see Nahum Dimitri Chandler's "The Economy of Desedimentation: W. E. B. Dubois and the Discourses of the Negro," in *Callaloo*, 19.1, 1996, 78-93.
2. This and "anthropologie sans complaisance" are essentially Diop's terms for what Ricoeur would call monumental or cosmic history, i. e. uninterrupted history from the time of Creation, or from the appearance of humans.
3. In *Myth and Philosophy: a Contest of Truths*, Lawrence J. Hatab writes:

Science can be understood as an isolated emphasis on certain features of language. Science, however, becomes problematic when such an emphasis devalues or excludes other elements of language. A study of the Greek language helps us speak to this problem. There we realize the *correlation* between concepts and ordinary speech. The Greek language unearthed scientific concepts from preconceptual soil. For us the concepts are *at the start* distant from other forms of language because the Greeks achieved this distance and passed it on to us, but a historical study more clearly reveals the connection between science and nonscientific language. If science and other forms of disclosure have a common linguistic environment, then the tendency to displace or demote nonscientific disclosure loses its absolute or unquestioned justification....[Bruno] Snell [in *The Discovery of the Mind*] has offered an

interesting treatment of this matter from a linguistic standpoint. He tries to show how rational and scientific concepts grew gradually and directly out of the Greek language, which would indicate the derivative character of all subsequent scientific terminology. (313-311, *passim*).

4. Egypt(ology) in philosophy can help clarify issues of ontology and epistemology as a necessary step to the broadening and reformation of Black literary theory. Only Egyptology that is readily amenable to this kind of reading is of immediate interest to me here.

5. George Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, falls within the conservative corpus of works on myth and archetypes in that he makes no connection between his "gods of antiquity in Egypt" (VIII) and Black Africa. This must be pointed out also because his "enquiry into the principles of Magic and the evolution of the Sacred Kingship in general." (VIII) receives a more up-to-date treatment in Michael Hoffman's *Egypt Before the Pharaohs*, where Hoffman clearly identifies the origin of the concept of the divine ruler in Black Africa. Then, there is the disturbing fact of Fraser's eagerness to point out the similarity between his approach and Hegel's in *The Philosophy of Religion*. My quotations of Fraser are from Volume 1 (London, Macmillan and New York, St. Martin's Press, 1966) of his multi-volume work. For the traditional Yoruba saying "*orisa l'oba*", literally "the king is a god", see Soyinka's *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*

6. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988. Here, Gates posits a Yoruba truism: "The most fundamental absolute of the Yoruba is that there exist, simultaneously, three stages of existence: the past, the present, and the unborn. Esu represents these stages, and makes their simultaneous existence possible, 'without any contradiction.'" (37) Unpacking this concept, he goes on to say: "This helps the non-initiate to understand so many of the *Oriki Esu* that refer to Esu as the father and the child, the first and the last to be born, and so on. What appears in a binary system to be a

contradiction resolvable only by the unity of opposites is more subtle—and mysteriously—resolved by the Yoruba in the concept central to the Ogboni secret society that ‘two, it becomes three.’....The Ogboni or the Osugbo....is comprised of the elder males and females of a society, those who embody wisdom....The signal emblem of this highly revered secret society is called the *edan*, a pair of bronze figures, one male the other female, linked by a chain. Peter Morton-Williams writes that the Osugbo signify their most fundamental metaphysical concept in the following cryptic utterance: ‘Two Ogboni, it becomes three.’ Morton-Williams contends that ‘The third element seems to be the mystery....The union of male and female in the *edan* image symbolizes this putting two together to make a third.’ The *edan*, presented to each initiate of the society, represents the transcendence of the binary opposition, of contradiction.” (37-38)

7. To those who believe Moses (like his followers) was actually an Egyptian and a disciple of Akhenaton (the author of the first recorded expression of monotheism), that he left or fled Egypt because he had rebelled against an Egyptian priesthood which had reverted to the cult of many gods after Akhenaton’s death, another Egyptian factor in Judaism and Christianity is the parallel between sections of the hymn Akhenaton composed in honour of the Sun god and The Book of Psalms in the Bible:

O Living Sun Disk...
Thou art beautiful,
great, glittering...(Hymn to the Sun god)

O Lord my God
Thou art very great...(The Book of Psalms 104)

When thy movements fade...
The land is darkness...
Every lion is out of his den... (Hymn to the Sun god)

Thou makest darkness,
And it is night...
The young lions
roar after their prey (The Book of Psalms 104).

On Judeo-Christian borrowings, also see the chapter "The Nile Valley Civilization and the Spread of African Culture" in ben-Jochannan's *New Dimensions in African History*.

8. In a way, this is also the essence of Chandler's article.

9. In *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Rodolphe Gasché's defence of Derrida provides information that guards against a simplistic reading of Derrida. However, even Gasché acknowledges essentially unsurmountable aporias in Derridian philosophy. See pp. 293, 317, 1, 137, 138,

10. In "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," his contribution to Brandom's *Rorty and His Critics*, John McDowell begs to dissent. He argues:

Richard Rorty is notorious among philosophers for his campaign against epistemology practised in the manner of the Cartesian and British-empiricist tradition. But putting it like that underplays how drastic Rorty's thinking about epistemology is. For Rorty, an activity in that vein is simply what the label "epistemology" means. He has no time for a different, and perhaps useful, kind of reflection that might still deserve to count as epistemological. My aim....is to urge that what I take to be Rorty's basic convictions, with which I sympathize, do not require so completely dismissive a stance towards the very idea of epistemology. Indeed, I want to urge that Rorty's basic project positively requires a more hospitable attitude to something that may as well be counted as epistemological reflection....The way to cure ourselves of unwarranted expectations for philosophy is not to drop the vocabulary of objectivity, but to work at understanding the sources of the deformations to which the vocabulary of objectivity has historically been prone. If we could do that, it would enable us to undo the deformations, and see our way clear of the seemingly compulsory philosophical problematic that Rorty wants us to get out from under. This would be an epistemological achievement, in a perfectly intelligible sense of "epistemological" that does not restrict epistemology to accepting the traditional problematic. It is the deformations, to which Rorty's discussions of truth reveal him to be party, and not the vocabulary itself, that lead to philosophical trouble. (109-121, passim, emphases added)

11. As quoted by Sunday Anozie, "Negritude, Structuralism, Deconstruction," in Gates (ed.), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1984, p. 118.

12. On Berber claims, see Afafe Ghechoua's detailed article "Que Veulent Les Berbères?" in *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, 2102-2103, April 24-May 7, 2001. It is also worth noting that the Egyptian Copts (in the main, descendants of the pharaohs) have also been engaged in a quiet battle that is largely unknown to the outside world. Though numerically a minority in present-day Egypt, they maintain they are not a minority –

given what a minority status always carries in terms of trouble from the dominant group(s). The Copts, in other words, believe their aboriginal status should be protected.

13. Malika Hachid, interview with Dominique Siwane in *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, 2014-2015, 1999, p. 103.

Chapter III

1. Wilson Harris, "The Complexity of Freedom", in Biodun Jeyifo (ed.), *Perspectives On Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2001, p.52. Derek Walcott concurs that *The Road* is undoubtedly a masterpiece. See Walcott in Robert Stepto's *Chant of Saints*.

2. Like Ogun, Osiris is the embodiment of harrowing disintegration and triumphant and redemptive/assertive reintegration (and immortality), the essence of the soul. Ogun's assertiveness in defence of the downtrodden does not invalidate the comparison: the messianic element is still there, common to both. In the Yoruba pantheon, the complementary essences of Ogun and Obatala might make the point more plausibly: "Yoruba myth syncretises Obatala, god of purity, god also of creation (but not of creativity!), with the first deity Orisa-nla. And the ritual of Obatala is a play of form, a moving celebration whose nearest equivalent in European idiom is the Passion play. The drama is all essence: captivity, suffering and redemption. Obatala is symbolically captured, confined and ransomed. At every stage he is the embodiment of the suffering spirit of man, uncomplaining, agonised, full of redemptive qualities of endurance and martyrdom. The music that accompanies the rites of Obatala is all clear tone and winnowed lyric, of order and harmony, stately and saintly. Significantly, the motif is white for transparency of heart and mind: there is a rejection of mystery; tones of vesture and music combine to banish mystery and terror; the poetry of the song is lytanic, the

dramatic idiom is the processional and ceremonial. It is a drama in which the values of conflict or the revolutionary spirit are excluded, attesting in their place the adequacy and certainty of a harmonious resolution which belongs in time and human faith. It is antithetical to the tragic challenge of Ogun in man.... (Soyinka, *MLAW*, 152). What Obatala lacks in the sacrificial act of being torn apart, Ogun has.

Chapter IV

1. This is the essence of Richard Poe's argument in *Black Spark, White Fire*. Poe dismisses, then reinstates, James:

James was more preacher than scholar. The ease with which he confounded facts and mystical dogma brings to mind certain fundamentalist Christians of today....Like many religious writers, James wrote for the faithful, not for the skeptic....Even so, it is precisely from such febrile screeds as *Stolen Legacy* that flashes of unexpected genius sometimes arise...Einstein stumbled on some of the key insights that would later form his theory of relativity. But what young Einstein grasped intuitively, he did not yet know how to express. Ten years would pass before Einstein figured out how to quantify those insights into a logical structure –a mathematical formula through which he could share his revelation with other scientists....George G. M. James appears to have experienced a similar epiphany. Unlike Einstein, he failed, in the end, to crystallize his insight into a sufficiently logical structure to convince other scholars. Yet, beneath its bluster and bombast, its overstatements, its hopus pocus, and its tortured facts, *Stolen Legacy* reverberates with a freshness and grandeur undiminished after four decades. James truly was a kind of mad genius. With few facts to go on, he leapt boldly into the darkness. And, as with Einstein, he landed on his feet....[Whether scholars today] like [the book] or not, James's ideas and obsessions have suddenly resurfaced, forty years after his death, at the core of a vital academic controversy. (87-88, *passim*)

2. See Henry L. Gates's reading of *Cane* as it refers to Toni Morrison's reading, in Gates, *Figures in Black*, pp. 196-224.

Chapter V

1. As quoted by Obi Maduakor, *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing*, New York, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986, p. 8.
2. Many of the works I quote or refer to point out inadequacies in Freudian

psychoanalysis. To these can be added Elizabeth Abel's essay, "Race, Class, and Psychoanalysis? Opening Questions" in Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong's *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application*, and Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean's *Materialist Feminisms*.

3. However, Senghor's prioritisation of feeling/intuition over thought as the defining characteristic of Blackness (a position which somewhat distinguishes his brand of Négritude from Césaire's, say) has offended many Africans and Blacks. Though Senghor and his supporters have argued that intuition and thought are equal, a degree of unease remains when, in my quotations of him above, Senghor makes the following prioritisations "c'est la sensibilité et, partant, l'âme plus que la pensée," and "elle privilégie la raison intuitive comme mode de connaissance."

Conclusion

1. Though my arguments already indicate the need to detotalise power in the centre-periphery relation, and suggest how only selected, progressive, concepts in poststructuralist thought help or accelerate this process, it must be emphasised in these closing pages that my position or, more accurately, that of the DBSC, is not a jettisoning of the whole spectrum of poststructuralist philosophy. Having already likened Hartsock's feminist position to the Black one, I would now like to enlist another minority position (Mohanty's, as already referred to above) whose comments are a lucid way of addressing the enervating effects of postmodernism and deconstruction. For my point is that the 'neutral', 'no ideology', no 'commitment', 'no truth' stance that generally characterises poststructuralism, is itself already not neutral, because of how, as a dominant discourse, it limits, through its propaganda, how minority discourses should be received or devalued in circles (academic and otherwise) where power resides and

where intellectual labour can be made to translate into socio-political gain. Mohanty defines his objective and identifies some of the key representative figures who are the object of his interrogation; and his points are still valid years after they were first expressed, while the effects of mainstream High Theory on minorities are still very real.

I quote him at some length:

My position in this book originates in the belief that the constructivism that informs so much of poststructuralist literary theory is *intellectually* inadequate or outdated. The arguments against objectivity and rationality are largely intended to displace notions of reason, explanation, and science that we have inherited from positivism....But postmodernism's critique of knowledge is limited because it does not consider reasonable alternatives.... At least since the 1970s, a nonconstructivist alternative....has been emerging. This postpositivist tradition, which is a version of philosophical realism, offers sophisticated accounts of objectivity and reason, basing itself on a reexamination of the actual nature of the "hard" sciences as complexly coordinated social practices. Postpositivist realists claim, for instance, that the "hard" sciences are not as hard as the positivists thought they were, for scientists typically rely on more than direct observation in the testing of theories....If our traditional understanding of scientific norms and criteria is not accurate, how must we reorient our political critiques of them?....This is the question that frames my book....The de Manian position is representative because it elevated to the status of doctrine some of the unease poststructuralist theories about language have always expressed about language., in particular about the extent to which it "fixes" meaning....De Man's theologization of language as endlessly disruptive of secure interpretation is predicated in part on a dubious reading of Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of the interpretant, which de Man sees as a refutation of the idea that the way words refer to the world might limit the range of interpretations we consider legitimate. (18-19, *passim*)

2. N. D. Chandler's article provides an additional angle on the issue.

3. In England in the early 1970s, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in a long interview, asked his then Cambridge University professor and thesis-supervisor, Soyinka, the following question: "...having lived here at least for the last year, and, one assumes, having associated yourself with some of the more original minds in Europe, how would you evaluate the intellectual climate in Europe?" Soyinka's reply is worth quoting at long length, which is why I feature it as a footnote, in spite of its direct onto-epistemological pertinence to my thesis:

I will say quite candidly that I have always considered the whole of European intellection, I suppose naturally, Euro-centered; because of this, it is very inaccurate and therefore a very untruthful system of analysis and

conceptualization—in fact, of human beginnings and development, thought and ideas. I don't think this is a wholly personal prejudice. You will find there have been quite a number of formidable scholars—Cheikh Anta Diop is a name that comes easily to mind, and also Chancellor Williams—have questioned and backed by [sic] research the assumptions regarded as the foundation of "human" civilization, what constitutes 'human' development. They have re-evaluated, in fact, the whole theory of social origins which have been postulated by European thinkers and scholars....I find myself very much preoccupied —if you like, naturally prejudiced—in favor of a wholesale re-examination, re-evaluation of European ideas. In fact, I question very much the intellectual value of a number of preoccupations of European scholars. And taking as the foundation of my thinking the ideas, the world-view, the philosophical concepts of my society, I find that Europe has for too long brow-beaten the rest of the world, and especially the African world, into an acceptance of the very fundamental system [of evaluation] which is, I suppose, natural to Europe. It is time the paths which have been blazed by a number of very serious African scholars should be followed up very rigorously. And the damage which has already been done—the waste of toil which has been indulged in by universities—seems very ridiculous. Tiny, really minuscule, academic studies, with no relevance at all, to a true understanding of man's situation within the universe—which I think is at the root the most fundamental aspect of all intellectual inquiry. I believe that one of the primary duties of African intellectual institutions is really not merely to question the system of thought of Europe, but to question the *value* of these systems, the *value* of these particular patterns of thought in European thinking...The deliberate suppression of facts, of historical facts, which are dug up by anthropologists; the biased, the very dishonest selectiveness of material, which then becomes the basis of supposedly rigid structuralism in analyzing social systems; the habit of ignoring or merely treating as curious the systems, the metaphysical systems, the philosophical ideas of African society. In other words, these are made sort of adjuncts to the European artificial systems. I think all of these would make me feel far too prejudiced, really, to make any comment on the European intellectual climate. I find myself completely outside of it. I find a lot of European intellectual structures really of irrelevance to myself as a member of my own society. In fact, the only justification for being preoccupied with these systems seems to me to be a need to recognize what they are, in order to undo, as far as we can, the immense damage which has been done to our society, and also to retrieve our centers of learning—our schools even, and our universities—from the wrong emphasis, from the time-wasting irrelevancies which have been given a very special badge of erudition, intellectualism and so on. All these things which really have distorted not just the abstract thinking of African scholars, but the *application* of such thinking to social and intellectual development in an African society." (as featured in Biodun Jeyifo (ed.), *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, pp.52-53, emphases added).

About thirty years later, Black theory has yet to rigorously tease out and systematise the literary (theoretic) potential of Black Egyptology.

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