





to represent is the experience of African Americans. In to represent is the experience of African Americans. In sto rep attempts attempts to supplant his or her attempts to supplant his or her precursors, carving a niche for him/herself. For example like Wrights, with the black experience but, by his own admission, his like Wrights, with the black experience but predominant predominant spokesperson of the condition predominant spokesperson of the condition of the African American c inadequacies of his representations.

Much Much of G Much of Gates Much of Gates s comments in this regard have radical implications for the conventi authorship authorship which inform traditional views of the African American literary project. For authorship which inform trad authors authors produce meaning in part by revising formal patterns authors produce meaning in part by revising formal patt of meaning . . . involves a . . . critiquing both of received literary con of meaning . . . involves a . . . critiquing both c represented represented in canonical texts of the t represented in canonical texts of the tradition (represented in canonic counter counter to some of the counter to some of the most cherished aspirations which counter to some of the most cherishe finding finding one s true (black) self and expressing it in words. finding one s true (black) self and expressing it in words. Blackt aa theory of parody because it undermines the very quest for literary originality and a theory of parody because it undermin has has for so long informed the view has for so long informed the views of black critics has for so long informed the vi theorists theorists (with the exception of Zora Neale Hurst theorists (with the exception of Zora Neale Hurston theorists American American works of literature, denouncing wh American works of literature, denouncing what they c American repetition, etc. Gates quotes one John Smythe to telling effect:

If there is any fault with us it is that If there is any fault with us it is that we are always a ping If there is any fault with u now now a distinct, and ever will be a distinct race in this country now a distinct, and ever will be a distinct race religion--makes religion--makes social distinctions. We are therefore bound by every religion--makes social distinction in in our being and by whatever self-respect in our being and by whatever self-respect you and I individually and colle make make ourselves--not on the pattern make ourselves--not on the pattern of any other race, but actuated by our ma literature, religion, commerce and social intercourse--a great people. (114)

There There was something shameful, in other words, in being mere mockingbirds. For Hurston, There was something originality originality is the modification of ideas (qtd. in originality is the modification of ideas (qtd. in Gates, 118), originality is also Gates s view.

Moreover, Moreover, Gates points out that many of the Moreover, Gates points out that many of the earliest More celebrated celebrated canonical white celebrated canonical white writers and deny a line celebrated canonical white writers and is not an entirely bad thing because, he argues citing Ellison, the

notion notion of notion of an intellectual or artistic succession based upon colour or racial notion of an intellectual or lessless absurd than one based upon less absurd than one based upon a common religious background. less absurd influence, influence, rather, can influence, rather, can be based on only formal literary revision. . influence, rather, can b escape escape the racism, essentialism, or nationalism often implicit in rubrics such as African or Jewish or Commonwealth literature. (120)

For For Gates, rather, the basis of a tradition must be shared patterns of language use For Gates, rather, the basis of a shashared, shared, discrete uses of literary language in texts that bear some sort of relationship to each other This This relationship is not one predicated upon the existence of an essential African American or black This relationship is r upon

cultural cultural heritage as shaped by cultural heritage as shaped by the American experience, the cultural heritage as s aa sharing of that *concord of sensibilities* which the group expressed through historical circumstance circumstance and through which circumstance and through which it circumstance and through w American culture. (121)

This This concord of sensibilities manifests itself textually. The blackness of black litera This concord of sensibilities man or metaphysical condition . . . nor is it some transcending essence that exists outside of its manifestations in texts texts (121). By the blackness of black texts (121). By the blackness of black literature, that that are shared, repeated, that are shared, repeated, c that are shared, repeated, critiqued, and revised (121) in response same socio-historical context.

It It is as a result of the foregoing, Gat It is as a result of the foregoing, Gates argues, It is as a result of the fo American American literary tradition seem to be related to other black texts primarily in terms of substance or content (122), (122), whereas they seem to be related to Western texts in terms of form (122). Where writers s (122), whereas t Ellison Ellison share common subjects (121) with what Ellison described as Ellison share common subjects (121) with what E ancestor ancestors (121) (w ancestor (121) (white writers such as Eliot or Proust) provided model texts for hasten hastens to point out that while hastens to point out that while mo hastens to point out that while most black writers genre, genre, many also revise tropes from substantive antecedent texts in the genre, many also revise tropes from substantive

writers read and critique the texts of other black writers as anwriters read and critique the texts of other black writers what Gates what Gates means by motivated (124) (as opposed what Gates means by motivated (124) (as opposed to u of literary revision which functions to clear a space, rhetorically (124).

Gates s Gates s point, in short, Gates s point, in short, is that pastiche or parody only renders explicit that which any implies: implies: that tradition is the process of form implies: that tradition is the process of formal implies: that tradition i announcement announcement of ostensibly concealed announcement of ostensibly concealed revision (124). announcement the the received textual tradition. . . . This sort of Signifyin(g) revision serves the received textual tradition. . . . This sort of Sign text text (124). The revising text is written in the language of the tradition, employing text (124). The revising text is w strategies, strategies, and its ostensible subject matter, the so-called Black Experience (124) in strategies, and its ostensible Signifyin(g), Signifyin(g), in short, is the figure of Afro-American literary history Signifyin(g), in short, is the figure of Afro-American