

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to examine patterns and variations in the layers of gazing in African American Travel Writing. The works examined are: Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself* (1789), Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), Nancy Prince's *The Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853), Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954), *The Color Curtain* (1956), and *Pagan Spain* (1957), Martin Luther King Jr.'s "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi" (1959), W.E.B. DuBois' *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (1968), Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), and Carolyn Vines' *Black and Abroad* (2010). The thesis tries to establish that the gaze is a critical shorthand for perceptions/perspectives and prejudices that a traveler or travel writer carries and produces at the moment of transaction. The thesis shows how the transaction involves not only traveling subjects and witnessed objects but also latent ideologies that go back to the identity and location of the traveler and the travelee.

This reading begins with the assumption that every travel narrative weaves patterns of gazing informing the traveler and the people and places visited. These patterns are constituted both by the traveling subject and the visited object which, in turn, may mutate into a combination of subject and object at unexpected moments. Further, there is a possibility of role reversals which ensures that the travel writer's gaze is a two-way traffic.

It is also found that when a traveler moves from a known to an unknown place (whether temporarily or permanently) the changed circumstances and experiences may result in changes in ideology or ideological moorings. Thus, the polyvocality of the gaze of the traveler gets firmly established with the politics of gaze being clearly seen at an ideological (innate consciousness or the cultural baggage) and experiential (acquired knowledge) levels. Moreover, these ideological changes produce further changes in self-fashioning that in turn produce and circulate other patterns of gazing. To this end, this thesis establishes that the patterns of gazing do not remain static and proliferate endlessly.

The fact that gazing is invariably a part of producing or consuming hierarchies, African American travel writing provides legitimate cases for further enquiry. To this extent, the present study aims at exploring how the self-fashioning of the traveling subject (African American travel writer in this study), is grounded in her/his 'native' cultural moorings which may include the baggage of educational background, history, racial and nationalistic affiliations, personal experiences, mobility, gender, religion, etc.

The study contends that the process of gazing changes its constitutive character depending on the location and subject position of the traveler-writer. We therefore have three distinctive ways of gazing involving subject-object positions: additive, diminutive and persistent. In the first case the gaze produced either elaborates or clarifies a hidden ideological position, whereas in the second case it provides a unique shorthand of a political or religious belief. In the third case, the gaze is a continuation of the traveler writer's ideology or personal belief but presented in a manner that is not subject to locational variations.

This study uses an eclectic tool combining ideological criticism with close textual analysis. The project also uses theories of gaze in combination with postcolonial reading practices to analyze the production, circulation and consumption of the African American traveler writer's gaze. The thesis establishes a connection between shifting paradigms in the travel writer's gaze to corresponding shifts in African American culture and changes in the way in which the 'black' American makes sense of America, 'blackness', and the world.

It is argued that in the process of recording these paradigm shifts, the travel writer compels the system of gazing to be filtered through two other paradigms of division—gender and religion—that explain how human beings exclude one another from their horizons of recognition and sociability. In other words, the way the 'black' American travel writer looks at the world is determined not only by what she/he knows of the world but also by how the world looks at her/his color, nationality, religion and gender. The gaze is as much a matter of production as of circulation and consumption, involving both subject and the object.