

Glenda Carpio

"Richard Wright and the African American Short Story"

After providing a broad introduction to the African American short story, this paper will focus on Richard Wright's novella, "The Man Who Lived Underground," and will explore both the particular status of the novella as a mixed genre (more than a short story, less than a novel), and Wright's use of the form. Wright's novella clearly shows him working outside of the strict protest tradition to which many critics relegate him, making use of a variety of sources (Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave," Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*, Camus' existential theories), but, at the same time, anticipating Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. My discussion of Wright's novella will show how the author addressed issues pertaining specifically to race relations in the United States but also those having to do with a wider array of existential concerns. Central to Wright's balancing of these two points of focus is his expert use of the novella and its liminal status in narrative studies.