

Racism In African American & South African Prose

Also featuring the works of:

- Richard Wright
- J.M. Coetzee
- Toni Morrison
- Nadine Gordimer
- Peter Abrahams
- Maya Angelou



DAN CHIMA AMADI

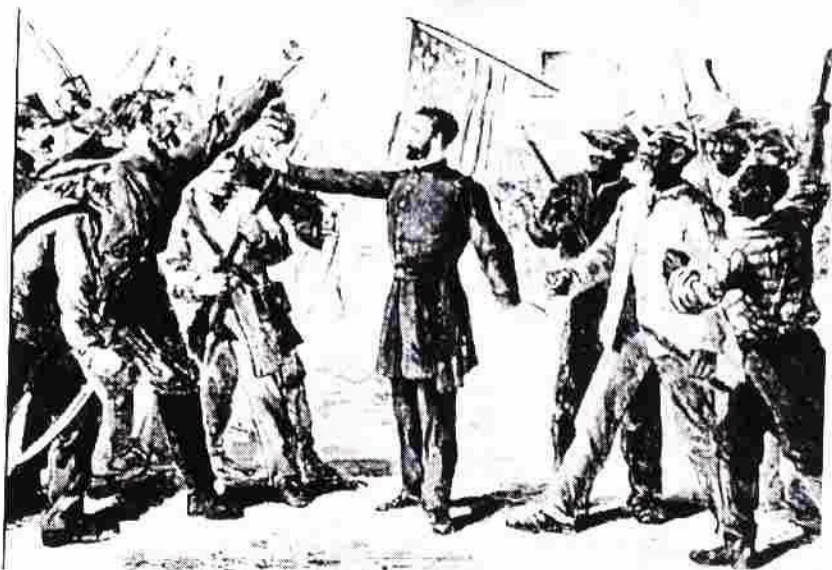


Racism in African American and South African prose: featuring the works of Richard Wright; J.M. Coetzee; Toni Morrison; Nadine Gordimer; Peter Abrahams and Maya Angelou By Amadi, Dan C. is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Racism In African American South & African Prose

Also featuring the works of:

- ┌ Richard Wright
- ┌ Nadine Gordimer
- ┌ J.M. Coetzee
- ┌ Peter Abrahams
- ┌ Toni Morrison
- ┌ Maya Angelou



DAN CHIMA AMADI

First Published in Nigeria 2012

SKILLMARK MEDIA LTD.

18 Kagha Street Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

e-mail: skillmarkmedia@yahoo.com

Tel: 08036690084, 08051090040

Copyright: **Dan Chima Amadi**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Author.

ISBN: 978-978-50919-0-8

TREASURE BOOKS

are published in Nigeria by
SKILLMARK MEDIA LTD.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Amadi who were steadfast and dedicated in nurturing us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful to God Almighty, the Fountain of knowledge from whose source I drew all inspiration and who has kept me alive up to this date. My gratitude knows no bounds.

This work is a product of my doctoral thesis. For this, I cannot thank enough the Vice-Chancellor, the Postgraduate School, Department of English/Literary Studies and indeed the Management of Abia State University, Uturu for their support which made it possible.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Professors Afam Ebeogu and Emma Ngumoha for their dedication and commitment to see me through this great work. Prof. Ebeogu shows his class by being a quintessential academic. Prof. Emma Ngumoha was particularly helpful at critical points. I thank Prof. Austin Chukwu, the External Examiner for his stand on academic excellence. It cannot indeed be any other way if we have to look at the future with hope.

Many thanks too to Prof. M.J.C. Echeruo for the very useful materials he sent from the United States. His words of encouragement will always remain a source of inspiration.

I am indebted to the Head of Department of English/Literary Studies, Kalu Uka for doing his best while the work was in progress. I cannot forget him in a hurry.

My gratitude goes to Professors J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada and Chinyere Nwahunanya for sparing no pain to make me complete this enormous discourse. Prof. Nwachukwu-Agbada has been particularly helpful with books and materials of which I am very grateful.

Lastly, let me thank my wife, Mrs. Chrisgora Eyiuche Amadi and our kids who stood by me at the difficult time of writing. For all, may God bless you. Thanks.

PREFACE

It must be admitted that a lot has been done in the last two decades to bring down the strangulating effect of racism. In the United States and South Africa, the world has witnessed tremendous changes not just in political affairs but in the economy and social circles as well. Efforts to tackle racism show that coordinated activities by both whites and blacks not only reduced its influence but set the world on the path of rectitude.

But how do studies show that racism is still the world greatest problem? It is because it is now manifesting in more subtle forms, in ethnicism, in greater loyalty to tribes than in nationhood. The rising tide of terrorism, guerrilla warfare, murder and assassinations all have their roots in intolerance, religious bigotry, ethnocentrism and racism. Thus, despite the astronomical development in science and technology, peace has continued to elude mankind. The world has become more insecure, far more than when the world wars were fought. Then, at least the enemy could be identified and located. Now terrorism has become more faceless because protest over religion, creed and tribe are better settled with explosives and bombs.

The first necessary step is to find out what the war is about. We must not be in a hurry to realize that we sold human beings for money and shedded blood with impurity. The violence we initiated is now hunting us.

Dan Chima Amadi

January, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Preface	v

CHAPTER ONE

Racism, Apartheid and the Shape of Destiny	9
Racism in America	14
Race Riots	20
Jim Crow	22
Uncle Tom's Cabin	22
Early Black Fiction in the United States	23
The Harlem Renaissance	30
South African Literature	35
Racism in South Africa	40
Post Apartheid South Africa and Racism	44
June 1976 Soweto Uprising	44
Relationship between American and South African Societies	50
Racism Today	53

CHAPTER TWO

Naturalism, Black Hopelessness and	
Post War Justice in Richard Wright's Novels	59
The Effect of Naturalism on Minor Characters	67
The Influence of Naturalism on the Major Characters	80
Wright's Literary Style	87

CHAPTER THREE

Search for Identity in the Labyrinths of Sex and Music in the Novels of Toni Morrison	99
Jazz	102
Song of Solomon	115

CHAPTER FOUR

Natural Space, Border Emplotment and Cross Cultural Hybridity in J.M Coetzee's Novels	129
His Works	131
Life and Times of Michael K.	139
Disgrace	155

CHAPTER FIVE

Painful Transition, Contemporary Historical Intersection and Dialogue with the Future in two of Nadine Gordimer's Novel's	169
Her Works	171
July's People	172
None to Accompany Me	184

CHAPTER SIX

Crisis of Redemption, Matyrdom and Iron Will in Two of Maya Angelou's Autobiographies	199
Her Works	201
I know why the caged bird sings	204
Theme	205
Her Rape	205
The heart of a woman	209
Whites on the side of Blacks	213

Division over approach	214
Angelou at the Heart of any Protest	218
Symbolism in the Vusumzi and Angelou's Relationship	219

CHAPTER SEVEN

Recollecting the Past, Locating the Future through the Present in the Novels of Peter Abrahams	221
Mine boy	225
Tell freedom	238

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Paradox of Historical Interlock and the Fate of Blacks in African and South African Societies	265
Conclusion	282
Works Cited	285
Bibliography of Relevant and Related Writings	301

CHAPTER ONE

RACISM, APARTHEID AND THE SHAPE OF DESTINY

INTRODUCTION

Racism is an evolving term, which is sometimes used synonymously with racialism. Recent studies have shown that while the terms are used interchangeably, they have definite qualities, which should not be confused. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, defines racism as: "the belief in the existence and significance of racial categories. In racial separatist ideologies, the term is used to emphasize perceived social and cultural differences among races".

For James M. McPherson et al, it is not easy to describe any individual, group or people without first establishing traits and the like that set him or them aside from other persons for recognition:

...The terms "Black" and "Negro" or "White" and "Caucasian" come freighted with connotations – explicit and implicit, conscious and unconscious. The terms are compounds of cultural traditions, fictions, categories, stereotypes, and brands. Thus our experiences and prejudices, (Whatever the hues of our skins) may affect the connotations that the terms "black" and "white" carry in any particular instance of our using them. This pertains to personal biases, whether of Alabama Sheriff or Black Panther, white radical or black conservative. And it pertains also to the assumptions and methods used in the serious study of Black Americans. (19)

It is important to make a distinction between racism and racialism as one is a stretch of the other. Scholars believe that racialism promotes well-being and mutual co-existence within acceptable boundaries while racism is usually seen as limitation of human association based on skin pigmentation. Wikipedia's definition of the distinction can be of help:

While the term racism often refers to individual attitudes and institutional discrimination; racialism usually implies the existence of a social or political movement that promotes a theory of racism. Supporters of racialism claim that racism implies racial supremacism and a harmful intent, whereas racialism indicates a strong interest in matters of race without these connotations. They say their focus is on racial pride, identity, politics, or racial segregation. Organizations such as the NAAWP insist on these distinctions, and claim that they vehemently oppose state sponsored racism.

Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book *In My Father's House* (1992) tries to establish a relationship between the two concepts. He sees racialism as inheritable characteristics and traits, which a race does not share with other races. Pierre-Andre Taguieff (1987) argues that racialism is synonymous with scientific racism, which can be distinguished from popular racism. For him, once racialism can be scientifically defined, it is racism.

W.E.B. Du Bois admits that there are differences between races, which he calls racialism but submits that these differences can only become racism when the belief is used to advance that one race is superior to other races. In 1903, Du Bois observes that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the

color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the Islands of the sea” (23). In his essay *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography on Race Concept*, Du Bois argues that insult and discrimination have become the heritage which “binds together not simply the children of Africa but extends through yellow Asia and into the south seas” (*Dusk of Dawn* 117).

Similarly in 1953, while still holding on to his view that “color-line is a great problem of this century”, Du Bois contended that he could “see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is the poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen.” (*Souls of Black Folks* xiii)

On the other hand, while trying to see the meaning of race from the angle of biology, Reece McGee believes the term race first appeared in scientific literature in 1749. He argues that: “at first skin color was used as an index for classifying human differences. But biologists soon realized that skin color was not a reliable criterion for classifying races because there is no sharp dividing line between one color and another” (195).

Over time, the race concept has been seen to carry two or double natures: popular views and real biological definition. The popular view which is usually manipulated by people to suit their purpose has always been misleading. It is to fully interpret the various angles of race that sociologists explore the concept from both biology and social perspectives. Theodosius Dobzhansky, a popular geneticist and biologist defines race as: “Mendelian (interbreeding) populations which differ in the incidences of some genetic variants in their gene pools”(228).

Reece McGee argues that:

Racism operates at two levels: the individual and the institutional. Individual racism consists of individual attitudes and actions that are recognized as prejudice and discrimination. Institutional racism is the operation of impersonal, social institutional forces or policies in such a way as to produce outcomes consistent with racial discrimination. (208)

Essien – Udom sees racism as an ideology. He submits that in racist ideology separate destinies exist for different racial groups. But John Twitchin defines racism as "perpetuation of a belief that human races have distinctive characteristics that determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one race is superior and has the right to dominate others, together with a policy of enforcing such asserted right and system of government and society based upon such a policy" (32).

Oliver Tambo, one of the then leaders of the African National Congress (ANC), thinks that racism has economic dimension to it. He believes that why white people continue to foster racism is because they have commercial interest at the back of their minds. He argues that the primary reason why apartheid survived for so long was because:

--- a highly industrialized system, well-armed state manned by a fanatical group of white men determined to defend their privilege and their prejudice, and aided by the complicity of American, British, West German, and Japanese investment in the most profitable system of oppression on the continent. (XI – XII)

Harold Proshansky and Peggy Newton see racial conceptions as a harrowing experience for the Negro. The trauma he goes through remains a life long experience which he comes to realize is because he is a victim born on the wrong side of the divide.

The racial world for the Negro child is not only empirical but also conceptual. To be a 'Negro' establishes 'who he is' by relating him to all other individuals, known and unknown, who have the same defining features. In time, he must realize the general nature of his racial category because others label and identify him in these terms, making his racial group membership the nexus of his emerging self-identify. To achieve such understanding, the child must first learn to make racial distinctions: to recognize and be aware of the differences in skin color and related characteristics between himself and others. (181)

Essien – Udom thinks that purity of the races is another reason why racism is developed as an ideology. He argues that this has led the proponents of racism to consider giving it both economic and political teeth. But this has led to some form of absurdity:

Its basic ingredient is the dogmatic claim of the existence of genetically innate and unchanging inequality among the races. In the broadest sense racism is a system of stratification by which the 'human race' and their civilizations and cultures are hierarchically arranged, each race occupying a fixed position from the bottom to the apex of the pyramid, so to speak. In this system of stratification some races are supposed to be innately and permanently superior, others are similarly inferior. In terms of physical criteria some races are

aesthetically beautiful while others are ugly, and their superior civilizations derive from their physical attributes. (236)

Worldwide promotion of racialism reached its peak with Nazi Germany racist policy of "Großdeutschland" (Greater Germany). Anti-Semitism led to the massacre of six million Jews. Anti-communism was also taken to greater heights. In Malaysia, racist policies of "Ketuanan Melayu" (Malay Supremacy) and the concept of Bumiputra (Sons of the soil) were bandied about. Recently, racialism has taken a new turn in the United States with its promotion by white separatist and white supremacists groups like Christian Identity, Aryan Nations, the American Nazi Party and White Aryan Resistance.

Racism is an important term in South African and African American literature. A review of this history shows that racism started earlier in the United States, from the period of independence through the civil war days.

RACISM IN AMERICA

The history of racism in America can be traced to the influence of the slave trade and the subsequent transportation of blacks to the New World. The Negroes were imported primarily to work in the plantations as sources of cheap labour. Other races, particularly Indians could not be considered slavery because:

First, the king had declared that the Indians were Spanish subjects and, thus, could not be enslaved. Secondly, the Indians were believed to be weak to withstand the arduous task of plantation farming. This view arose because the Indians who were compelled to work in the mines and plantations died at alarming rapid rates during the sixteenth century. (Chigbo 24)

The disease resistance of the Negroes made Africa the first port of call in the search for cheap labour. Inter-tribal wars which were rife in those days produced these slaves in large numbers. Once the Negroes arrived in America, their escape was impossible as their dark skins easily gave them away. The Thomas Jefferson declaration of independence in 1776 from Britain was a landmark event, which should have made racism unthinkable in the United States or at least reversed its course significantly. But this was not to be. Jefferson had enthused at that declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments is instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. (qtd in Redford et al 605)

One of the reasons why the American War of Independence (1861-1865) was fought was slavery. On 12th April, 1861, seven of the confederate states seceded from the union when Abraham Lincoln was president. Lincoln went to war to keep the nation intact and the war between the North and the South ended in favour of the North. Taking a retrospective look at the issues that gave rise to the American Declaration of Independence, he could not reconcile himself with the demands of the warring South and the stand of the founding fathers. He reminded his compatriots that a standard had been instituted and this standard must be:

Constantly, looked into, constantly laboured for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated and thereby constantly

spreading and dispersing its influence and augmenting the happiness and value of life to people of all colours everywhere. (Baster 406)

It is to the eternal credit of Lincoln that slavery was legally abolished in the United States.

Lincoln would yet make his immortal speech at the cemetery constructed to bury the over six thousand Americans who died at that great civil war in a speech at Gettysburg. His speech would excite historians and mark a watershed for the whole of mankind in a new wave of the concept of liberty. Far more than his age, Lincoln would leave a legacy that would establish a correlation between liberty and justice, individual freedom and political liberty and then the true meaning of democracy, which is everywhere quoted namely:

That from these honored dead we take increased devotion. They gave the last to that course for which we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. (qtd in Carnegie 167)

Although the Southern States of Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Northern and Southern Carolina and two years later, Virginia, Mississippi and Texas came back to the Union, the practice of racism was rigidly enforced there. And as Chigbo again notes:

It is important that few constitutional amendments during this period gave the blacks some measure of freedom. Initially, a slave was regarded as not being a full human being. A slave was $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person. With the abolition of slave trade and slavery, the population of the blacks in southern states

increased. This gave them advantages both in elections and at the congress because each slave was now counted as a full person. This was made possible by the 13th amendment of the constitution. While the 14th amendment gave equal citizenship, the 15th amendment gave blacks the right to vote. They were no longer disenfranchised. (Chigbo 28)

After the abolition of slavery, discrimination against black people was so intense that a New England Negro sponsored the emigration of thirty-eight Negroes in 1815. He was so wealthy that he was able to carry this enormous task, which is believed to have inspired the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816 (Essien – Udom 33). Soon after the abolition, the Negro found out that he was neither a slave nor fully integrated within the mainstream of American life. The few Negroes who achieved economic independence and so became 'white middle class' could not lead other black people for the simple reason that they could not command the loyalty of the people. To be considered different, some Negro leaders proclaimed themselves 'race-men', a teaching which was popularized in the nineteenth and early twentieth century where black leaders saw themselves neither as racists nor link themselves with racial movements and organizations.

During the American war of independence, survival and liberty were the key words. Blacks were enlisted both as soldiers and labourers, but it was never the intention of white Americans that they would serve with blacks under the same tenure and as equals. But the war was a two edged sword:

Black Americans participated in the American Revolution in two ways; as contributors and as beneficiaries. As contributors, blacks played a part

increased. This gave them advantages both in elections and at the congress because each slave was now counted as a full person. This was made possible by the 13th amendment of the constitution. While the 14th amendment gave equal citizenship, the 15th amendment gave blacks the right to vote. They were no longer disenfranchised. (Chigbo 28)

After the abolition of slavery, discrimination against black people was so intense that a New England Negro sponsored the emigration of thirty-eight Negroes in 1815. He was so wealthy that he was able to carry this enormous task, which is believed to have inspired the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816 (Essien – Udom 33). Soon after the abolition, the Negro found out that he was neither a slave nor fully integrated within the mainstream of American life. The few Negroes who achieved economic independence and so became 'white middle class' could not lead other black people for the simple reason that they could not command the loyalty of the people. To be considered different, some Negro leaders proclaimed themselves 'race-men', a teaching which was popularized in the nineteenth and early twentieth century where black leaders saw themselves neither as racists nor link themselves with racial movements and organizations.

During the American war of independence, survival and liberty were the key words. Blacks were enlisted both as soldiers and labourers, but it was never the intention of white Americans that they would serve with blacks under the same tenure and as equals. But the war was a two edged sword:

Black Americans participated in the American Revolution in two ways; as contributors and as beneficiaries. As contributors, blacks played a part

as labourers and soldiers. Thousands of slaves escaped to the British lines and thereby won their freedom; some of them served with the British forces against their erstwhile masters. The colonies, in contrast were at first reluctant to enlist blacks as soldiers, both because of the common assumption of their inferiority and because of the threat that their enlistment would pose to the institution of slavery. But the colonists' manpower needs eventually overcame their reluctance, and before the conflict was over at least 5,000 blacks had entered the fray as soldiers on American side. (McPherson et al 45 – 46)

Having fought along with the whites, seeing many of them fall in battle, the invincibility of the white man was demystified. The libertarian ideology of the revolution and the wave of republican and abolitionist sentiments of the period came to the aid of blacks. The constitutional convention of 1787 was a boost, but it would still be a long walk to freedom for the blacks.

The concept of racism in both South Africa and the United States is the same although differently described. In South Africa it was apartheid while in the US it was called segregation or separation. The United States General Assembly made up of the Senate and House of Representatives had passed a law making it punishable for anyone to teach the slaves to read and write. As of the time of enactment, it was a fine not exceeding one hundred dollars and imprisonment not exceeding six months for a free white person. There were additional fifty strokes of the cane if the offender was a free person of colour.

The essence of the law then was to take a long-term view of the possible emancipation of the black people in the United States where they could pose a threat to white dominance. To contain the black man was a well-taken step to whip him into line. Yet, while skeptics carried on without decorum, human sense, civilization and black protest would exert their toll. Thus, by the time the United States Supreme Court ruled on the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, on Monday 17, May 1954, the world had noticed a considerable shift in policy. The Ku Klux Klan denounced the judgment while a member of the House of Representatives- John Bell- described it as a Black Monday. But the worst was yet to come.

In the United States, purity of the races was taunted and bandied about. Proponents consistently put this forward as a reason for official racial segregation. They argued, first, that colour pigmentation was an act of God, which ought to be preserved and protected. Thus, this was promoted at official places, schools and places of leisure such as hotels. Emergence of cults was primarily to protect and promote this ideal. In marriage, these cults fought against inter-marriages and defaulters were visited with violence. The situation was particularly rife in Southern states where the Supreme Court decision was openly challenged and where racial purity and the protection of white womanhood were advocated.

When the civil war ended, many blacks migrated to northern cities in a movement called the "Great Migration" (McPherson et al 185). During the First World War, about 367,000 blacks fought on the side of the US although racial discrimination and prejudice trailed their service. In the Navy, blacks were excluded from important positions and none of them were admitted to the marines. The 5,300 black recruits lived their service in utter disillusionment although they performed

creditably. Within the officers corps of the army only 1300 blacks were commissioned after intense pressure from organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), (black students, civil right leaders and black press). (McPherson et al 192-193).

Woodson G. Carter remarks that before 1861, 90 percent of the black slaves and half free blacks in America were illiterate. This was accentuated by legislations forbidding blacks from being taught to read and write. The position was reversed through the founding of private schools by free blacks and missionary societies.

RACE RIOTS

Between 1885-1915, nearly 3000 black men and women were lynched in the United States of America. This barbarism took place on the slightest suspicion and provocation and blacks usually paid the supreme price. But by far the most shameful led to race riots where white mobs beat and killed blacks, destroying their property and invading their neighborhood. Charles Darwin's theories were used to justify white supremacy, among other sources of authority cited. Race riot was rather vaunting in the 1920s. On this, Thomas F. Gossett in *The History of an Idea in America* says: "There was a riot between whites and blacks in Chicago in 1919 in which 23 whites and 15 Negroes were killed, 537 people injured, and 1000 left homeless. Less than a year later, there was another major one in Tulsa Oklahoma". (371)

The post war era, spanning both the civil war and the First World War was a period of great depression for the Negro. He was everywhere discriminated against and only menial jobs were offered him. If he made a higher bid, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was there to visit him with violence. He lived in over-

crowded shanties and was constantly under police surveillance. Charges could be preferred against him at the least provocation and he knew those who enforced the law did not trust him. The paymaster was the white man who could fine him at will. And since the Negro knew that he had little education, there was a limit to his quest.

Harlem was the home of the Negro. It was not that he did not want to live in other places, but he was constrained to live his entire life in this neighbourhood where he could be contained and easily hunted. As Long and Collier observe in *Afro-American Writing*, Harlem is not just a Negro Community: "It is a city within a city, the greatest Negro city in the world" (323). The founding of Harlem would later become the source of retrogression for the Negro. Since blacks were clamped together in this neighbourhood, it became a good reason to neglect, disparage and subjugate them. The Negro world was a life of suppression.

The Negro deprivation would reach a crescendo in his relationship with the black woman. As the white man did not trust him, so was the black woman who preferred to recline towards the white man. For his own salvation, he turned his libido to the white woman who was ever being protected by white cults. In the Southern states, the situation was quite grave where black women constantly summoned white police officers to protect them. This practice and the adverse reaction of the black man made the black woman hate her male counterpart. She believed that the black man was sexually perverse as Calvin C. Horton says:

The black woman worked more than the black man, around white people-cooking, house cleaning, taking care of children and she received more of the white man's favor as she had by white men, and in a

twisted way received some kind of "affection" from them. She was, therefore, instilled with some attitudes toward the black male that white people held. She, for instance, came to believe that her man was a rapist of white women, and she acted out, all at once, emotions of hatred and jealousy and repulsion toward black men. (14)

From his capture through the brutal middle passage, the Negro discovered he was now a human cargo, owned and ought to be bought or sold. He would live through this indenture status to chattel hood and this would be a permanent feature between him and his former slave master. It was here then that the race relations and prejudice began and would be fostered by economic and political pressures. Slavery was the forerunner of race prejudice, and colonialism gave it grand impetus and approbation.

JIM CROW

The concept of Jim Crow was a factor in American history, preceding Uncle Tom's Cabin. It was used as racial term to denigrate blacks. It was not as irritating to blacks like coon or darkie but however resented. It gradually acquired a status as laws to oppress blacks. On 18th May 1896, the United States Supreme Court in the case Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the concept of separate but equal public facilities and by so doing gave approval to Jim Crow laws all over the country. By 19th century, however its popularity had waned.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

The concept of Uncle Tom's Cabin began with a book published on 20th March, 1850 with that title by Harriet Beecher Stowe. She wrote it in response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which required American citizens in Northern states

to return escaped slaves to the South. The mission of Stowe in the novel was not to achieve racial equality but her concern was on religion, family and motherhood.

Stowe believed slavery was too painful to go into and thought it would end by itself. The book did condemn slavery but it was not the first anti-slavery book. It was clearly the most successful which sold 10,000 copies in the first week and over 2,000,000 within two years all over the world. (The Civil War Preservation Trust info@civilwar.org). By 1879, there were more than fifty-nine traveling companies performing Uncle Tom's Cabin throughout the United States.

EARLY BLACK FICTION IN THE UNITED STATES

In its present state, it is clear that African Americans have made their impact on American literature. American literature by the 17th century modeled itself along British literature. This position changed significantly in the 18th century, partly because of American desire to assert herself in both politics and art, and partly because of American Renaissance taking place at the period. This period spanning 1830s – 1865 produced such notable writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman etc. In his assessment of early American literature Protus O. Kemdirim says:

The first notable American literature was written by Captain John Smith, an English soldier of fortune whose reports of exploration were strongly shaped by a New World Consciousness. His writings, published in the early 1600s were a catalogue of themes: myths, images, characters, events, and locales. These were later to become a basis of the national literature. In 1776, the year United States achieved its independence Noah Webster declared,

"America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics, as famous for the arts as for arms". (31-32)

Before 1880, only three published novels by African Americans were recorded. By 1920, about thirty of them had appeared, although according to McPherson et al:

The authors of these novels were by and large members of the black middle class, and their novels reveal the tension and ambivalence in that class's view of the racial situation in America at the turn of the century. On the other hand these novelists tried to counter myths of racial inferiority by presenting black characters whose values, behavior, and speech are indistinguishable from those of the white middle class. On the other hand, they express from time to time a more self-consciously black sense of pride and outrage, a sense that perhaps the only solution for black Americans is to defy, rather than emulate the behavior of the whites. It was the task of these novelists to try somehow to resolve the tension between emulation and defiance (174)

Although Stephen Crane and Gertrude Stein have been credited as the most important white writers to treat the problems of the black Americans since the civil war in their books, *The Monster* and *Malincha* respectively, it is Mark Twain who gives central positions to black characters in his two major novels: *Huckleberry Finn* (New York, 1885) and *Pudd'n Head Wilson* (Hartford, Conn, 1894). Not only does Twain challenge racism in the novels, he highlights the inhumanity inherent in sanctioning slavery. He also brings to prominence the dignity of the black personality in his portrayal of Jim, the

slave in Pudd'n Head Wilson, although we fail to see him differently from the world of racism he condemns. Twain is significant in the fight against racism because his mission at that period is indeed a bold one.

Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris soon appeared on the stage but they were not as well gifted as Mark Twain. While Harris concerns himself with the life of Georgia blacks, Page romanticizes on the defeat of the South as a disaster, the ideal plantation system and loyal African American to the benevolence of white masters. Albion W. Tourgee proves to have great talent in his effort to show that intense racism in the South can be countered by the determined efforts of Northerners to enforce equal rights.

Toinette's first novel published in New York in 1874 and later re-titled *A Royal Gentleman* in 1881 tackles the life of a Southern mulatto and her daughter as they relate with both Southern and Northern whites during the war and the post war era. George Washington Cable wrote many essays and lectures but he appeared not to be having an in-depth knowledge of the racial problems in America. He was both a writer and commentator on Southern problems. His most famous works were *Dr. Sevier* (Boston, 1885) and *Madam Delphine* (New York, 1881).

From the fore-going, it can be seen that African Americans have been expressing their resentment of racism from the earliest times. Their cumulative efforts helped to abolish racism and encouraged the eventual journey of blacks to the White House.

While African Americans wrote poems, plays and spiritual books, they also wrote autobiographies to counter the course of racism. Roger Whitlow believes that:

During the same period that George Horton, James Whitfield and Mrs. Harper were publishing their

early volumes of verse, black autobiography was reaching its maturity and black fiction was born. Nearly thirty autobiographies – or slave narratives, as most of them were – were published by black Americans during the nineteenth century prior to the civil war. (39)

Whitfield argues that some of these autobiographies have been out of print for more than a century. Some like *Putting on Ole Massa* (New York, 1969) by Gilbert Osofsky which contain slave narratives like that of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown and Solomon Northup. Arna Bontemps's (*Boaton*, 1969) contains the narratives of Gustavus Vassa. Those that survived include *Narratives* by William Wells Brown (1847) and *The Life of Josiah Henson* by Josiah Henson. Harriet Beecher Stowe is believed to have used some of the incidents in Henson's account to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Others include *Narrative* (1849) by Henry Box Brown, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Slave* (by) Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853) by Solomon Northup and *Running A thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860) by Ellen Crafts. Some of these autobiographies were expanded and renamed several times like the autobiography of Frederick Douglass which was published as *Narratives* (1845) and expanded as *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855 and later expanded and published as *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* in 1881. In 1892, it was further refined and published under the same title.

The first three black fictions were published in the 1850s. William Wells Brown wrote the first novel in 1853. He was a runaway slave and the novel was entitled *Clotel or the President's Daughter*. It was later republished as *Miralda* (1860-61) or *The Beautiful Quadroon, Clotelle* (1864) or *A Tale of Southern States and The Colored Heroine* (1867). Brown's

novel has been criticized for its outrage against melodrama, propaganda and digression. But it is undoubtedly a beautiful novel, rich in detail and lucid in its portrayal. Many find it readable and enjoy its nineteenth century idiom.

The second novel by a black American is *The Garies and their Friends* which was published in London in 1857 by Frank J. Webb. Webb is seen to have been a better artist than Brown and is somewhat related in style to Charles Dickens and Scott. *Blake or The Huts of America* by Martin R. Delany (1812-1885) is the only novel written by its author, considered as being more militant than the novels of Brown or Webb. The novel was set in Mississippi and Cuba and was marked by political consciousness where its hero, Blake, planned to cause slave uprising in the South and Cuba. But didactic poems and songs that have little bearing with the plot and hurriedly contrived dialogues weakened its aesthetics.

The period 1890 to the start of the Harlem Renaissance saw a development of artistic consciousness by black American writers. Born free and trying to create a niche for themselves in the United States, they began to articulate their thoughts in writing. Some efforts were committed to thoroughness and seriousness. They soon directed their attention to "Black Codes" and "Jim Crow" laws which deny blacks voting rights and the right to receive good education. Black consciousness was heightened by the ruling of the Supreme Court of the United States that the Civil Right Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and in 1896 while blacks challenged discrimination in public places ruled in *Plessy V Ferguson* that "separate but equal" public accommodation were "reasonable" for blacks.

The outstanding black American writers of this period were Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Waddal Chestnutt. Significantly both were brought up in Ohio but Chestnutt, who was largely successful as a lawyer published five novels and the biography of Frederick Douglas. Edward Margolies summed up Dunbar and his career thus: "Born in Dayton, Ohio, the son of a fugitive slave who had fought in the Union Army, Dunbar won high academic honors in an all-white high school. But because he was "very black", Dunbar could only find work as an elevator operator." (27)

Chestnutt's short stories were highly rated and his second novel, *The Marrow of Tradition* was published in 1901 in Boston, and this collection appeared as his best. Dunbar on the other hand is best known for his poetry, which dwells on plantation life and in dialect form of the black-white relations. *Oak and Ivy* published in Dayton, Ohio in 1893 deserves acclaim. Dunbar appears not to be living up to expectations in dealing with the problems of black life in America. Of his four novels, the fourth, *The Sport of the Gods*, published in 1902 in New York appears to be his best.

Paul Laurence Dunbar is generally regarded as the first black American distinguished poet. Charles Chestnut and James W. Johnson wrote the best fiction of the period and W.E.B. Du Bois was perhaps the most gifted essayist of any age on racial relations. Dunbar died of tuberculosis at the young age of thirty four, but before then, he published two volumes of verse *Oak and Ivy* (1893) and *Majors and Minors* (1895). William Dean Howells who was Dunbar's mentor and who sponsored his other collections is said to have discouraged him from writing issues of protest (Whitlow 55). Thus, except in his novel, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) and his short story, "The Lynching of Jube Benson" Dunbar refrained from the issues of racial

injustice and protest, perhaps to win the approval of the white middle class readers. Dunbar also chose white protagonists for his four novels that greatly irked the blacks of his generation. He was thus seen by the black middle class as a sell-out. His "accommodationist" racial sentiments which adorn his fiction and poetry preach black servitude and the idea that blacks should persevere in their lowly state. "Keep A-Pluggin' Away" from *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1895) is particularly about his "accommodationist" racial sentiments.

Dunbar's sentiments will later be shared by other black novelists like Oscar Micheaux in *The Conquest* (1913), Henry F. Downing in *The American Cavalryman* (1917) and Mary Etta Spencer in *The Resentment* (1921). In his criticism of their works, Robert Bone says in *The Negro Novel in America* (1965):

They "play white" in their novels in much the same sense as children 'play house' - - - their antagonist are not prejudiced whites but rather those 'Lazy' or 'indifferent' members of the race who, in their view, willfully refuse to succeed. (59)

Favourable reviews believe, especially in the case of Micheaux, that the novels were thinly disguised autobiographies which recorded the Herculean tasks they surmounted which came more from blacks. Du Bois similarly wrote uninspiring fiction like *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), *Dark Princess* (1928) and the trilogy *The Black Flame* (1957, 1959, and 1961). *The Black Flame* is clearly a response to Washington in the wake of the dust raised by his book *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Autobiography of W.E.B Du Bois* (1968). Du Bois is mainly remembered for his essays which have formed the bedrock of the thesis on race relations in America for which he will be forever remembered.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Strong opinion put the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance as 1919 and the publication of Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die" (1919) as the spark that started the cultural movement. Black cultural organizations like Writers Guild in New York, the Black Opals in Philadelphia and the Saturday Evening Quill Club in Boston also helped. Harlem then played a part as the capital of Black American Culture and the nurturing ground for major writers of the period. It was also a period of the Jazz Age when restless whites helped to ferret it to an astronomical level. The Renaissance orgy was exacerbated by white writers who treated black themes. They include Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *All God's Chillum Got Wings* (1923), Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926), Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (DuBose Heyward's *Porgy*) (1925) and Mamba's *Daughters* (1929) and *Nigger Heaven* by Carl Van Vechten (1926). The climate of the period was one of restlessness and a curiosity to find out what could cheer and what made many sad. Since writers were on hand to interpret this climate, publishers found themselves inundated with manuscripts of all sorts in a way never seen before.

In 1925, a black Howard University professor, Alain LeRoy Locke published a classic, the anthology of black essays, fiction, poetry and drama, titled *The New Negro*. He also published *Four Negro Poets* (1927), *The Negro in America* (1933), *The Negro and His Music* (1936) and *The Negro in Art* (1941). The impetus created by Locke's anthology reveals a conscious effort by blacks to put behind them the protests paranoia of the nineteenth century, the grim of plantation life and an open embrace and acknowledgement of their blackness. This was what the new Negro meant and this penetrated all aspects of black American life and a pride in black art and artistic authority. Such black writers include Claude McKay, Jean

Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, George Schuyler, Arna Bontemps and Zora Neale Hurston, emerged at the period. Through a good education, emotional detachment and peer influence they were able to produce good literature that gave a good account of their dedication.

Mckay wrote *Home to Harlem* (1928), a best seller for which he was fondly remembered in his days. Mckay was criticized by black writers like DuBois for highlighting the ugly image of Harlem. Mckay published other novels like *Banjo* (1929), *Banana Bottom* (1933) and a collection of short stories *Gingertown* (1932), and an autobiography, *A long Way from Home* (1937). But Mckay's greatness can be seen in his last book of verse, *Harlem Shadows* and last novel, *Banana Bottom*. In the novel, Mckay dramatizes a young black Jamaican girl, Binta Plant who was raped at twelve by an eccentric village man, Crazy Bow Adair. She was sent to Europe after that by a missionary couple named Craig. Binta returns to Jamaica where the Craigs want her to marry another missionary, Herald Newton. Binta rejects Herald when he is found defiling himself with a goat. She marries Jubban instead, the farmer from whom she finds marital bliss and emotional fulfillment.

Jean Toomer wrote *Cane* (1923) which is more of poetry than fiction but which established his name in American body of letters. As a prose sketch, it moves with cadence and explores the spiritual side which Toomer was known to crave for in life but which he never fully realized. Countee Cullen's only novel, *One Way to Heaven* (1932) is about an unbelieving professional "convert" who later strengthens the faith of his wife. Langston Hughes' reputation as a poet is known but he wrote two autobiographies - *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder As I Wonder* (1956).

Nera Larsen (1893-1963) published two novels, *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). She was the recipient of a Harmon Foundation award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. *Quicksand* is a better work in the consideration of her readers which treats the problem of the mulatto in American society. The heroine of the novel, Helga Crane, a twenty-three year old restless mulatto is dissatisfied with her neighbours and world. She abandons Noxos, the black Southern School where she is teaching and moves to series of locations. She takes several jobs until she spends several years with her aunt at Copenhagen. She refuses a Dane's offer of marriage and returns to New York, where she meets Mr. Pleasant Green, a visiting black Alabama preacher. Here Helga is "converted".

Quicksand has been criticized for its hurriedly contrived role for Helga that is considered unworkable. This is largely because the chemistry between Mr. Green, the uncouth preacher and the highly exposed Helga is just a bad union. Nella Larsen is generally not considered to be in the mainstream of Renaissance writing despite the fact that her two novels were published at the closing era of Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance came to an end soon after the crash of 1929 but black American writing continued.

George S. Schuyler published a very successful satirical novel, *Black No More* (1931) which is an attack on black social codes and those of whites. His posture shows he is an anti-Renaissance writer. His article "the Negro-Art" *Hokum* published in 1926 in *The Nation* is a good example. Arna Bontemps wrote three novels, *God Sends Sunday* (1931) which x – rays the squalor of the Renaissance era and its fast life, gambling and drinking. In 1936, he published *Black Thunder* which is about slave rebellion of Gabriel Prosser in 1800 and *Drums at Dusk* (1939) which is also about slave uprising based in Haiti. His best novel is *Black Thunder* which

he presents in a controlled mood and journalistic grace. Zora Neale Hurston is considered the last great writer of the post-Renaissance era. She reflects her unpleasant childhood in *Dusk Tracks on A Road* (1942). She did extensive work on black folklore which took her round Deep South states and the West Indies. Apart from her satirical book on race relations, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), she wrote three novels: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). The first two explore folk tradition while the third is based on the relationship between sex and racism. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is often compared with George W. Henderson's novel, *Ollie Miss* (1935).

Richard Wright represents the group of writers who wrote under Urban Realism. His novel, *Native Son* (1940) and autobiography *Black Boy* (1945) will set a standard for which most of his contemporaries will trail. He wrote nonfiction *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941) and *Whiteman, Listen!* (1957). *Lawd Today* (1963) was his last novel which is very much on the theme of *Native Son*. The influence of Richard Wright has been immense. Robert Bone found a name for his influence- "Urban Realism" or "Wright School". Writers who wrote in this vein include Chester Himes in *If He Hollers let Him Go* (1945) and *Lonely Crusade* (1947), Ann Petry in *The Street* (1946), Curtis Lucas in *Third Ward Newark* (1946), Willard Savoy in *Alien Land* (1950) and Lloyd Brown in *Iron City* (1951). Critics like Robert Bone and Roger Whitlow believe most of the writers of Wright's school are mediocre, except perhaps Mrs. Petry and Willard Motley. Ann Petry wrote three novels, *The Street* (1946), *Country Place* (1947), *The Narrows* (1953) and a collection of fiction *Miss Muriel and other Stories* (1971). Some writers who should be included in Wright School include William Attaway in *Blood on the Forge* (1947).

The next group of black writers to lift black writing to a higher level include: Dorothy West in *The Living Is Easy* (1948), James Baldwin in *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953), Gwendolyn Brooks only novel, *Maud Martha* (1953), William Demby in *Beetlecreek* (1950) and Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952). With these writers, black writing reached its apogee. Margaret Walker's only novel *Jubilee* (1966) was translated into many languages and is meant to serve as a response to white "nostalgia" fiction about the antebellum and reconstruction South. Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) is considered as the last important novel of the period.

After the Wright School, writers who wrote looked at the American society bleakly. They adopted satires and the theme of Armageddon to reflect the good of the period and the uncertainties that characterize it. Kristin Hunter wrote two novels, *God Bless the Child* (1964) and *The Landlord* (1966). Her satire touches most of the urban race types. Ishmael Reed also wrote two novels, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* (1967) and *Yellow Black Radio Broke-Down* (1969). In his satirical pieces, Reed attacks the myth, capitalist ethics, indiscretions and stupidities in American society. Reed attacks the foibles across the divide, hitting both blacks and whites.

William Melvin Kelley's best first novel is *A Different Drummer* (1962) which is situated in a Deep South state. Other fictions include *Dancers on the Shore* (1964), a collection of short stories and three novels, *A Drop of Patience* (1965), a satire *Dem* (1967) and *Dunford's Travels Everywhere* (1970). Gordon Parks wrote on the rural Kansas in *A Learning Tree* (1963). Hal Bennette wrote about rural Virginia in *A Wilderness of Vines* (1966). Sarah E. Wright dwells on Maryland's Eastern Shore in *This Child's Gonna live* (1969). Robert Deane Pharr

looks at the Southern Urban sporting life in the Book of Numbers (1969). Black writers who expressed theories of Armageddon include Don L. Lee in *Don't Cry! Scream* (1969), Sonica Sanchez in *We A Baddd People* (1970), Imamu Amiri Baraka's (Leroi Jones) *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965) and in his collection of stories and sketches, *Tales* (1961). But Amiri Baraka's fiction is not easy to read as he spends time in circumlocution. Another writer is John A. Williams in *The Man who Cried I am* (1967) and *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* (1969) and Sam Greenlee in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969).

SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

African Americans have a longer literary history than South African blacks. For one, they started earlier and their experience has a longer period of gestation. Education for blacks in South Africa came through the missionaries who also helped in the consolidation of apartheid. While Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of An African Farm* (1883) is noted as the first attempt to introduce feminism into the novel form, Solomon Thekiso Plaatje's novel, *Mhudi* (1930) is one of the first known novels written by a black author. The book was in an African language, a kind of fore-runner as future black writers either wrote in English or Afrikaans.

Alan Paton published the international bestseller, *Cry, the Beloved Country* in 1948. The book chronicles the story of a black priest who comes to Johannesburg to find his son. Andre Brink was the first Afrikaner to have his book banned by the government for his book, *A Dry White Season*. It is the story of a white South African who is shocked by the truth of a black friend who dies in police custody. Zakes Mda published *The Heart of Redness* which won the 2001 Commonwealth Writers prize and was later included in the South African schools'

curriculum. Thomas Mofolo wrote a Sotho classic, *Chaka*. Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1971), an autobiography, brought him international acclaim. He also wrote *Africa My Music*. He treats the theme of his exile in two of his novels, *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* set in Zambia. *Chirundu* is concerned with two black South African exiles where one decides that a return to police torture and exile is preferable to living abroad. Mphahlele also wrote short stories in *Man Must Live* and *The living and the Dead*. Other South African writers who wrote good short stories include Nat Nakasa, Themba, Arthur Maimane, Bloke Modisane, Richard Rive and Alex La Guma.

Alex La Guma wrote short novels that dwell on the excruciating pain of living under apartheid. He also wrote *Beyond Naturalism* and gave penetrating insights into the nature of mankind. They include *A Walk in the Night* and *Three Fold Cord* which tackle the life in South African ghetto. *The Stone Country* is somewhat autobiographical as it records his experiences while in prison. *Fog of the Season's End* is about the life of an activist in South Africa. *Time of the Butcherbird* x-rays the forced removal of black South Africans to territorially segregate homeland.

Bessie Head has distinguished herself in her novels: *When Rainouts Gather*, *Mary* and *A Question of Power*. The novels tackle the theme of exile and alienation which draw from her life on exile in Botswana, although she is a South African citizen. Peter Abraham is the first South African to attract international recognition with his novel, *Mine Boy*. Most of his works were written while he was in exile in Ghana, England and Jamaica. They include *A Wreath for Udomo*, *Wild Conquest*, *The Path of Thunder* and his autobiographies *Tell Freedom* and *Return to Goli*.

Some South Africans like A.C Jordan and Jordan K. Ngubane wrote in African languages. A.C Jordan wrote *Inggumbo Yeminyanya* (The Wrath of the Ancestors) which is a classic of modern Xhosa fiction. *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzo* (His Frowns Struck Terror) written in Zulu by Jordan Ngubane was also widely received. Ngubane wrote *Ushamba* in English which was later banned in South Africa.

Andre Brink, a white South African writer, published in 1974, his first politically committed novel, *Looking on Darkness*. Here, he indicts the white South African minority regime which he concludes as inhuman. Jane Larkin's Crain sees the novel as an "Anatomy of racist South African society". Nick Totten sees *An Instant in the Wind* also by Brink, as "the immediate political mythos" of Brink's South Africa. Lewis Nkosi evaluates *Rumours of Rain* by Brink as a chronicle of the sins of commission and omission to the South African Minority regime. *A Dry White Season* by Brink did not go down well with his critics.

Nadine Gordimer and J.M Coetzee are the leading South African novelists living today. Apart from the fact that they have both won the Nobel Prize for literature, they have consistently shown in their writings that they are opponents of the apartheid policy.

In the 1950s, *Drum Magazine* was used by South African writers to air their views, essays, fiction and satirical reviews. Yet, it need be mentioned that Nadine Gordimer's novel, *July's People* released in 1981 dealt the real decisive blow on apartheid by its prophetic preview of the collapse of apartheid. Other writers include Mongane Wally Serote who wrote *No Baby Must Weep*, with an insight into the everyday lives of South Africans during the dark days of apartheid

Literature review on South African literature dwells on the unique nature of the society. Apart from apartheid, there is a tendency by South African writers to weave their literature around themselves, through biography, autobiographies and diaries. On this score, the writings have been rich and compelling and in a way inundating. The problems of identity have assumed a frontal role in the evaluation of art in that region. "Autobiography as a vehicle of protest in South Africa" by Sonja Bahn takes a critical look at the use of autobiography by blacks to explore the cultural diversities of South Africa. Bahn's finding is that Black South Africans explore the condition in South Africa by seeing it through their private life experiences. Shane Graham looks at the society in his essay "The Truth Commission and Post Apartheid literature in South Africa". He tries to find out if the commission has truly laid the foundation for reconciliation and how far this has been reflected in the literature of that society.

Gwendolen M. Carter traces the origin of white-black confrontation in South Africa in "South Africa: Growing black-white confrontation" and concludes that when the peacefully demonstrating South African high school students exploded into violence in Soweto on June 16, 1976 in response to police brutality; they set off a chain reaction of black protests that later engulfed that society. Carter takes this study to the very root of that complex society and the evolution of each group that have come to compound the South African situation.

Emeka Nwabueze tries to locate the South African personality by evaluating the history of that nation through the prison eye of one of the longest serving political prisoners in any nation. His article, "The Memoir as Literature: Evolutionary Meliorism in Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom" looks at the concept of meliorism and the wonderful elastic capacity of

Nelson Mandela and projects that love of the fatherland and the ultimate love of God can get the best out of any nation. Mandela's optimism brings hope not only to South Africans but indeed the entire world.

Isidore Diala in "Biblical Mythologies: Apartheid and Anti-Apartheid Readings" argues that the use of the holy book to justify injustice and indignities of blacks is central to South African literature. Taking André Brink as a case study, he says that the bible is distorted to suit racist ideology. He analyses the Christianization of apartheid and the appropriation of religion by the Africana Establishment to justify an inhuman system. He says that the act gives apartheid its final legitimacy.

In a forward looking piece, both David Attwell and Barbara Harlow try to take a look at South Africa after apartheid in a piece titled, "Introduction: South African Fiction After Apartheid". After taking a critical look at the post apartheid literature, the two scholars argue "that the story is one that was both consensus building and controversy generating". South Africa under a new name and the horrors of revelation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are landmarks in an attempt to reshape that society.

Brian Worsfold takes a critical look at "Growing up with Apartheid: A look at the socio-political background in Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*". He explores the horrors of blacks in the apartheid era and the indignities they have to go through.

Ethnicity and race will similarly mould South African literary study if we have to consider its evolutionary trends and what Andrew Asheron describes as:

beginnings of a frontier society, and a resultant frontier mentality which was decisively to affect

race attitudes in South Africa. Being intensively engaged in the struggle for survival, a frontier society can afford to give little consideration to other peoples. Under such conditions, self-identity and status, through the use of social distance must be kept to a maximum. In the meeting of the pastoralist Boer and African (1770 onwards) and with competition for water and grazing lands, it became imperative from the Boer point of view to dominate the Africans and to accentuate their difference. (62-3)

South Africa has a rich diverse literary history. In her review of the South African literary history, Christine Loflin argues that her literature should not be separated into periods involving race, ethnicity, geography and language alone but must include popular culture, oral culture and vernacular. She says that the analysis should be made based on historical, social and political considerations, a framework that could reveal issues that bind rather than the current framework that divides it.

RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The earliest contact between white and blacks in South Africa had a missionary colouration. The civilizing mission apparently had no commercial orientation. But the rich mineral resources of South Africa would attract such notable countries like Britain and the United States because three quarters of the world gold lie buried in the country's earth's crust. Until the 1960s, these two nations monopolised both the import and export trade of South Africa. They would later be joined by France, West Germany, and Japan. The interests of these highly industrialized nations greatly boosted South African economy and technology and France would make herself pre-eminent in the supply of arms (Carter and Meara 94).

The deliberate exclusion of blacks from the advancement of this nation made agitation to come early and more violent and difficult to resist because of the swiftness applied in the extermination of the uprising. Africans in this land were the first to notice the enormous wealth of their country and the least in the continent to be rewarded politically. By the time many African nations were busy achieving political independence, blacks in South Africa were being repressed educationally, politically, economically and socially. The result was a great rise in African nationalism in that country where not one African was allowed to participate in the legislature that fashioned how the country was ruled.

Two officially sponsored and enacted legislations sealed the hope of blacks in South Africa for half a century in a land nature had placed them. The Population Registration Act and the Group Act, both passed by the South African white dominated parliament in 1950 saw the black people ceding their choice lands to white settlers. The two million whites used their votes to subjugate the over twenty million blacks. What was worrisome in the South African situation was that both sense and logic were not applied in the reward of political appointment. Voting rights were denied Africans. Nelson Mandela had to go to Robben Island prison for twenty-seven years, out of which eighteen years were spent in one cell. The Sharpeville Massacre and rising violence in South Africa were some of the signs that all was not well in that region.

Paradoxically, it is difficult to draw value judgment from the proponents of racism in both societies as they consistently refer to the Holy Bible in support of their claims. The Afrikaners in South Africa saw separation of blacks and whites as a divine act. The Dutch Reformed Church saw Africans as hewers of wood and Afrikaners as their God-sent rulers. To control black

education, the white minority regime introduced the 1953 Bantu Education Act. To contain black agitation and violence, the authorities enacted the 1967 Terrorism Act with which blacks were incessantly clamped into jail for the slightest offence (Carter 103)

On 19th October, 1977, the South African minority regime banned 19 black organizations, including the Black Students Organizations (SASO), BPC (the adult wing), the Union of Black Journalists etc and sent to jail most of their leaders. The death of Steve Biko, the young South African black leader in police custody did not ameliorate things. As George Orwell rightly observed in Nineteen Eighty-Four, "the greater the opposition, the tighter the despotism". Urban protests and demonstrations increased and the Apartheid regime became more intolerable.

The black-white relations in South Africa took place from about 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established a settlement to the East at the fringes of the African continent. The area they occupied now known as Cape Town, was taken over by the Dutch settlers. The groups were frenetic with the protestant teaching of John Calvin and were desirous to impart same on the natives who were considered to be heathens. The Christian mission was swift and the conquest of the natives decisive as they were quickly driven off their lands. Many of the Bushmen or San were crushed before the superior weaponry of the new settlers. But the missionaries did not find it so easy with the pastoralists, Khoikhoi or Hottentots, who fought gallantly but ultimately ended up as servants and labourers.

Meanwhile, slave trade had commenced and some slaves were bought from East Indies and other parts of Africa. The prospects of cheap labour made the settlers abandon their

earlier intention of depending on white labour. With the dearth of white women, the male settlers saw options in the slave women, Hottentots and Bushmen. This resulted largely in a breed now known as coloured, which forms a large percentage of the South African population.

With the growth in the population of the coloured people, they soon began to spread eastward along the coast. They however met stiff resistance in the Nguni tribe along the great Fish River, an area largely now known as Transkei and Ciskei. The coloured people waged series of wars to seize the lands of the natives from 1791, but the will of the better-armed new settlers held sway. Like in the other areas, the conquered people succumbed to miscegenation, cheap labour, squatting and servitude. Glowing with this military success, the coloured carried their luck to Natal but they were stiffly resisted.

The experience of the blacks would be visited on the Dutch settlers. The British soon occupied the territory, annexing it in 1815 when the Dutch allied with the French during the Napoleonic wars (Carter & Meara 95). By 1834, slavery was abolished and this led Africans in the cape to acquire a new status. In a movement now known as the Great Trek, the Boers, as the Dutch were called, were gradually moved from the Western part of the Cape. Some of them crossed over to the Natal region and were brutally massacred. In 1838, the Boers returned in revenge at Blood River and Africans suffered the same fate. This victory, which is still being celebrated by the Afrikaners, led them to want to create a separate state which was foiled by the British annexation of Natal in 1845 (Carter and Meara 96).

The racial problem of South Africa would become more complicated with the coming into the country of Indians,

Moslems and other whites. The Indians were to work in the plantations and then return to India. But many did not and so a new population was built from there. The Boers moved further North where they established two Republics: Orange Free State and South Africa Republic (Transvaal). There they firmly institutionalized racism by affirming that there should be "no equality of black and white in church or state".

In 1867, diamond was discovered in great quantity at Kimberley, which made the Boers want to annex it as part of their republic. This attracted British interest who annexed Transvaal in 1877. Although the area was returned to the Boers when the British army was defeated at Majuba Hill in 1881, the discovery of gold in 1886 in Witwatersrand reef registered the interest of other Western nations like France, Britain, Germany and the United States as the Boer control could no longer be tolerated. Britons and Americans were hired to mine the rich mineral deposits.

Tension began in the area when heavy taxes were imposed on Africans with a view to forcing them to the wage structure. To assert their position, the Afrikaner regime began to resist the Boer excesses by denying the foreigners the power to vote. This sparked off the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902, following the abortive coup of 1896. In the Jameson Raid, which was done to supplant the administration in Transvaal, the British Government and the Prime Minister of the Cape were implicated. Despite the utmost endeavour of the British and the assemblage of a large army, Her Majesty's army was defeated.

POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND RACISM

June 1976 Soweto Uprising

The background to this event which is now commemorated as a national holiday in South Africa was the protest of high

school students in Soweto for better education and the police reaction with live bullets and teargas. The crisis was fueled by prolonged anti-black policies. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 led to the establishment of a Black Education Department in the Department of Native Affairs. The goal of this Department was to compile a curriculum that would suit "the nature and requirements of black people." Dr Hendrik Verwoerd who was both the author of the legislation and Minister of Native Affairs stated that "Natives (blacks) must be taught from an early age that equality with Europeans (whites) is not for them."

Unfortunately for the whites, the Bantu Education Act helped more blacks to enroll in schools in Soweto, but under deplorable conditions. There were lack of facilities; teachers and those who taught were unqualified. The situation was aggravated by the apartheid regime's homeland policy which barred new schools from being built in Soweto from 1962-1971. Although government yielded to pressure to build new schools, the figure was grossly inadequate. The result was that those who were not engaged formed gangs and clashes began.

By 1975, when South Africa entered economic depression government was spending only R42 per black child and R644 on a white child. This fueled racial consciousness and underground agitation. The South African Students Movement (SASM), the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and Black Consciousness began to unite to voice out their protest. The other objectionable issue was the introduction of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in schools. As some of the teachers could not speak the language but were required to instruct with it, the unity of students with their teachers was now complete.

In the morning of 16th June 1976, thousands of students went to Orlando stadium to protest the use of Afrikaans. The students sang and waved placards with slogans like "Down with Afrikaans", "Viva Azania" and "If we must do Afrikaans, Vorster must do Zulu". Colonel Kleingeld fired the first police shot and students replied by throwing stones. The first person to be shot was Hastings Ndlovu and then twelve year old Hector Pieterse.

On the morning of 16th of June 1976, 23 blacks, and two white people were killed in Soweto, including Dr Melville Edelstein who had devoted his life to the social welfare of blacks. The racist South African government immediately deployed 1500 heavily armed police men and the South African Army was placed on the alert. At the end of the crisis, the casualty figure was put between 200 -600, while more than 1000 people were wounded.

A racist society of South Africa can be likened to the country's principal prison, Robben Island. In this prison, most South African political activists were incarcerated. The wardens of the prison urinated close to the inmates' food and those that collapsed out of exhaustion were moved away in wheelbarrows. Racism continued as if the origin of the Island and South African Society was the same. There is a link between Nelson Mandela and Makanna, the six-foot commander of the Xhosa army who was drowned trying to escape from the Island and the equally six-footer Nelson Mandela who spent twenty-seven years on the Island. Both men were fighting against white domination, Mandela against racist South African laws and Makanna banished there for leading a ten thousand strong army against the British. But that is perhaps where the comparison ends. Mandela is highly educated, being a lawyer who combined his education with

political activism. On the other hand, Makanna barely educated sought an escape from what he considered an unjust banishment. Mandela never sought an easy route to his freedom.

On January 31, 1985 the then president of South Africa, P.W. Botha offered Mandela conditional pardon, if only he would renounce political violence. But in Soweto Jubulani Stadium, Zindzi, his daughter, publicly read her father's response, to Botha's request on February 10, 1985:

I cherish my own freedom dearly, but I care even more for your freedom. Too many have died since I went to prison. Too many have suffered for the love of freedom. I owe it to their widows, to their orphans, to their mothers and to their fathers who have grieved and wept for them. Not only have I suffered during these long, lonely, wasted years. I am not less life loving than you are. But I cannot sell the birthright to the people to be free. (623)

Mandela had condemned the racist policies of the government of Botha and called for the unbanning of the African National Congress and freedom for those either sent to prison or exile for opposing apartheid. Above all, he called for the dismantling of the apartheid system itself. But Botha worried and under international pressure remained adamant. F.W. de Klerk who succeeded him would eventually see reason and on 2nd February, 1990 while addressing the South African parliament in Cape Town announced the release of political prisoners and the lifting of ban on political organizations. He promised that his government would go into negotiation with all interest groups and thus making "the process of negotiation" to be of the "highest priority".

De F.W. Klerk lived up to his promises as negotiation began that year and in May 1994, the first ever democratic elections in South Africa took place in which Nelson Mandela, leading the African National Congress won and was inaugurated the first black president. His first term ended in 1999 and was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki. The end to the gruesome years and the elevation of blacks from their subservient position marked a significant development for both politics and art in South Africa.

Thus, in the 1990s, a significant change in South African literature occurred. The literature of this period articulates the uncertainties that characterized this era, "the tension between memory and amnesia. It emphasizes the imperatives of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture or representation in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding" (Attwell and Harlow 20).

South African literature from the 1990s is comparable to Soviet literature after glasnost. But apartheid had a different mission from the political situation that prevailed in the Soviet enclave. The question then was what would be the preoccupation of South African writers now that apartheid had been dismantled? Would African writers live up to expectations by turning their attention to the new democratic state and find a lasting solution to the inter-racial conflicts? Both Attwell and Harlow believe that: "in post apartheid literature, the future has little future, whereas the future of the past is reasonably secure". (3)

Through the pattern of democratic evolution three epochs can be identified in South African literature. First is the quiet era of subtle evolutionary segregation of which Peter Abrahams (black and coloured) and Ezekiel Mphahlele Tell Freedom

(1954) *Down Second Avenue* (1954) gave a good account in their autobiographies respectively. The second epoch is the introduction of apartheid and the violent protest that greeted it. The third is the era of reforms, transition and post apartheid. Opposition to discrimination among writers can be codified into black, coloured and white writing. The codification is essentially not on the level of commitment but the racial information of the South African literary society. Considering the generic theories, there is always something in each to be found in the other, although treated differently. The theme of racism cannot on its own be exhausted, once the topic can be examined from different flanks.

The post apartheid literary publications have been immense. J.M. Coetzee has been out with his memoir, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. In the book, Coetzee continues his plaasroman, the ideological codification of writing. The thrust of the message is on the uncertainties of the post-apartheid era, the murder of white farmers and the need for quiet land reforms. Through "lineal consciousness", Coetzee traces the relationship between a child and generations before and after him. Land which is immortal outlasts both the child and the preceding and successive generations. The child then does not own the land; on the contrary, the land owns him and will cover him in its bowels. Coetzee's next work, *Disgrace* was awarded the distinguished Booker Prize, in 1999. By this, Coetzee became a two-time recipient of the prize having won it in 1983 with his *Life and Times of Michael K*.

Zakes Mda came out with *Ways of Dying* which has been attacked for its unpartisan outlook in a post-apartheid era in which blacks are actively involved. Mark Behr's *Sindive Magona* wrote two autobiographies: *To My Children's Children* and *Mother to Mother*. Andrew Bruck's *An Act of Terror* tells of

the omnipotence and the image of destiny which apartheid represents. Thomas Landman escapes the apartheid security forces but at a great cost. It is only in *Imaginings of Sand* published in 1996 that Brink advocates political changes. In the *Rights of Desire*, Brink explores what Isidore Diala calls: "Afrikaner's sense of disgust and estrangement arising from the new dispensation in South Africa" (917)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AMERICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETIES

The long drawn battle between whites and blacks and the implication of this for the harmonious working relationship of the two groups is an interesting theme for writers. The battle has been tortuous and long for blacks and not completely unscathing for whites. For both societies, it was clear that freedom would be achieved through some form of violence. In South Africa, the war was far more violent than in the United States. In her assessment of the situation at its peak, Gwendolen M. Carter says:

When thousands of peacefully demonstrating South African high-school students exploded in violence on June 16, 1976, in response to police brutality, they set off a chain reaction of black protests that have erupted intermittently ever since. From its side, the government has increased repression.....The Chief of its Security Police, Brigadier C.F. Zeitsman, declares that his men are building a "steel ring" around the country to prevent infiltration and to block the flight of exiles. He confirms gun battles with African National Congress guerrillas in rural areas of the northeast but admits that "the main battle is against urban terrorism". (93-94)

Violence and racism are twin evils in both societies. Racism is an important term in the literature of South Africa and that of Black America. This is because the term conjures oppressive memories and it is the starting point in the discussion of literature in both societies. Since the responsibility of the writer is to reflect his immediate society, the emerging art is a certification of that which is prevalent in those societies. The place of the black person in the two societies is that of a servant. Although legislation and fierce criticism have tended to change things, we still see inequality in all spheres of life.

It is pertinent to review the two societies from an analytical stand-point. Although we are talking of black people, their situation is not what one could describe as similar. The African American situation is particularly unique. African Americans were brought to America involuntarily. They thus did not fit into the mould of voluntary immigrant pattern. The American society was also harsh on them on arrival. With racial segregation, they were lumped into slums and legislations were enacted to prevent them from acquiring literacy, just as there were laws to prevent miscegenation. Will Kymlicka, while assessing the African American situation, argues that:

They came from a variety of cultures, with different languages and no attempt was made to keep together those with a common ethnic background. On the contrary, people from the same culture (even from the same family) were typically split up once in America. Moreover, they were legally prohibited from trying to recreate their own culture (e.g. all forms of black association, except churches, were illegal). (Kymlicka 24)

Efforts were made by early black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey to create black states in the South in the 1930s and they had support. Kymlicka contends that the move was even endorsed by the American Communist Party (24). But migration to northern cities prevented blacks from realizing this dream. The situation is such that there is no state in America where African Americans form a majority (Kymlicka, 25). Fighting through the civil rights movements, African Americans see themselves as entitled to full membership of the mainstream American society.

However, the basic difference between African Americans and other minority groups is that while the other minority groups came voluntarily as individuals or families, African Americans were herded unto American society forcefully. This act of working on their psyche has prevented them from quick, smooth and natural full integration.

The case of South Africans is somewhat similar. As they were herded off from the areas where they naturally saw as their habitat, there were stiff legislations to prevent them from full integration with their white counterparts in the same country. Whites used descent-based considerations as a maxim for integration to national life. With the official promulgation of apartheid in 1948, the majority fell into the category of minority and racist structures held sway. Seeing this as unjust, Kymlicka says: "national membership should be open in principle to anyone, regardless of race or color, who is willing to learn the language and history of the society and participate in its social and political institution" (23).

Emeka Nwabueze articulates it better when he compares the two societies:

An interesting relationship exists between the South African literature and its African American counterpart. The preposterous nature of the societies, the illogicality of their moral imperatives and the consequences of these for fictional depiction are major issues in both South African and African American literature. The fictional form in the two societies is both thematically and stylistically interfered with and indeed circumscribed by the dictates of the socio-political environment. The Blacks in South Africa suffer in the hands of a white minority; the blacks in America suffer in the hands of a white majority. In South Africa, segregation assumes a human face and appears as a legitimate weapon of oppression in the name of apartheid. In America, segregation started with slavery and when slavery was abolished, the image is of a partnership between a horse and its rider. (27)

The discovery of America in 1492 by Christopher Columbus opened a new route for trade and that included slave trade. In a way, therefore it can be said that repression of blacks has a longer standing history in the United States than any where else in the world, though not necessarily more in intensity. In the circumstance, it might be better to treat the two literatures separately by taking writers and their works exclusively. It is believed that this may be a more rewarding experience.

RACISM TODAY

Recent studies including the internet have shown that racism is still the world's greatest problem. This is because ethnicism is a form of racism and legislation against the practice including worldwide condemnation has made its application more subtle

and its practitioners more faceless. Frustration in the modern world has made individuals to vent their spleen on people of different colour, believing that they in one way or another contribute to their plight.

Joshua Miller admits that efforts have been made in the recent times to address the problems of racism, even by conservatives like George Bush Sr. and George W. Bush Jr. For instance he admits as progress the appointment of the first African, Clarence Thomas, to the Supreme Court in America, the first African American male Secretary of State, the first African American female Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. But he argues that the opposition of their appointments by major civil rights organizations was: "because of the reactionary track records of the nominees and perceptions of cynical motives harbored by the nominators" (1).

Joshua Miller also takes a hard look at the progress made by African Americans but still concludes:

That racism exists today is indisputable, as evidenced by the desegregation of schools and neighborhoods, the extraordinary numbers and proportions of incarcerated people of color, the high rates of disabling illness and lower life expectancies among people of color, and the continued presence of racial stereotypes uncovered by social psychologists conducting research projects across the country-to mention only a few indicators. And yet, unlike in the 1950s and 60s, there is no major social movement comparable to the civil rights movement, virtually no government initiatives to address racism, and little public discourse in mainstream media about race and racism.

(<http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/57/1/151-9> of 08/06/08).

There is a new concept now finding its feet in American society. It is the belief that racism is on the reverse and white people are now the victims of racism. Aaron David Gresson in his contribution to *Racism: Essential Readings* wonders "how in the decades following the civil rights movements and Great Society, racism became "reverse racism", with whites as victims and those who have suffered past and present racial oppression positioned as having special privileges: "The oppressor is now the oppressed, and the victim is now the villain" (qtd in *Psychiatric Services* January 2006).

The kind of racism that is giving concern to African Americans is the one subtly practised in schools and work places where African Americans are denied places to make room for white people. Aaron King in reviewing the 90 year progress of African Americans says:

When 13 parents led by Oliver Brown first challenged the racial segregation of the Topeka, Kansas school system in 1951, they looked to overturn 90 years of the "separate, but equal" statute in the United States. By 1954, when the case appeared before The Supreme Court, Martin Luther King had begun preaching equality in Alabama, and the Civil Rights Movement was fully underway. The decision in *Brown V. the Board of Education* was meant to cure the racial ills of all of America's education stems, from elementary to university. It was intended to save as the temporal partition separating "now" from "then". But if 1954 was supposed to be a turning point, it has been a wide bend. (King 1-2)

In South Africa, racism is very much in place, even with the black majority rule in that country. Chris McGreal in his article

"South Africa Today: there is racism, but not in public", he argues that legislation; the new states of South Africa and world wide condemnation have merely driven racism underground, making its practice more insidious and surreptitious. He says:

A generation after Mandela walked free, race sometimes seems as dominant an issue today as it was in the darkest years of apartheid. No more so than during the past week as South Africa has grappled with the significance of a video showing Afrikaner students at the university of the Free State in Bloemfontein humiliating black women. The video prompted days of demonstration on the campus with some black students warning white people that they were no longer welcome at the university, and provoked angry denunciations across the country from politicians, teachers and the civil rights groups. Eleven Afrikaner organizations issued a joint condemnation of the video as "disgusting". (1)

The racial situation in South Africa is still very grave. Whites have maintained their lead in all sectors of the economy despite the fact that blacks have been in power since 1994 when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated its first black president. McGreal argues that: "large racial inequalities remain, with white people accounting for just 9 percent of the population but 45 percent of the country's income. But that has not stopped widespread talk of a new anti-white apartheid and questions about whether white people have a future in South Africa" (2).

Megan Lindow believes "Racism holds South Africa Back". He says that a 2002 study conducted in the city of Cape Town found that 67 percent of respondents had never used a

computer before, and only 14 percent had internet access. This is certainly a disturbing situation. Although Nigerian figure at the moment may not prove better, what is however worrisome is that:

“a decade on, South Africa uniquely straddles the developed and developing worlds, with a wealthy minority enjoying living standards comparable to Spain's while coexisting with an impoverished black majority. Despite the growth of a sizeable black middle class, old racial divisions are largely reinforced by continuing economic inequalities. No other country except Brazil has such disparities of wealth. This schism is particularly apparent in South Africa's burgeoning technology industry, which remains largely white”
(Lindow 1)

Government spokesman in South Africa, Themba Maseko, had told the Associated Press that racism was still strong in that country. His view can be found in CNN.com edition of 6th March, 2008. Barnaby Phillips in George, Western Cape, contends in “South Africa's Struggle with Racism” that racism has not diminished in South Africa. His comment came after Wanda Stoffburg was attacked by irate whites who felt she was bringing in too many black people. To where? Her attack which was outside her house also gave her a mark with a sharp instrument to carve a “k” onto her chest. “K” is an abusive term for black people. The attack provoked an anti-racism march organized by Reverend Nkosinathi Ngesi who admits: “there are also blacks who are also racists – we cannot run away from that as well. So we are addressing the two sides of the story here” (2)

CHAPTER TWO

NATURALISM, BLACKS HOPELESSNESS AND POST WAR JUSTICE IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S NOVELS

NATURALISM

Naturalism as a distinct movement became noticeable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century novel. Naturalism was a theory advocated by Emile Zola, Maupassant and other nineteenth century French writers who rejected the supernatural religion and advocated that the natural religion was sufficient for man. It was a close following of nature without idealism. Naturalism believed that science had all explanations for what could be found in the world. As a 19th century movement, it sought for factual and realistic description of life, claiming that all religious truths were derived from nature and natural causes, and not from revelation. In art and literature, it called for close following of nature. The concept seemed to have been derived from Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest which infiltrated into literature and arts. It was even more difficult for the Negro writer to break the barrier cutting him off from the literary world. It was generally believed Negroes should be confined to physical and not menial work. Many whites, for instance believed that Negroes were not capable of producing any work of art that had merit. To conceive this, according to them was to take the Negro beyond his world. Yet, as soon as very few blacks debunked his notion, some benevolent whites began to entertain the possibility that blacks could produce arts of merit.

Richard Wright who was born in 1908 near Natchez, Mississippi is best remembered for his works dealing with twentieth century black-white relations. Wright did not have a normal sweet childhood as most children of his age had. His father

CHAPTER TWO

NATURALISM, BLACKS HOPELESSNESS AND POST WAR JUSTICE IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S NOVELS

NATURALISM

Naturalism as a distinct movement became noticeable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century novel. Naturalism was a theory advocated by Emile Zola, Maupassant and other nineteenth century French writers who rejected the supernatural religion and advocated that the natural religion was sufficient for man. It was a close following of nature without idealism. Naturalism believed that science had all explanations for what could be found in the world. As a 19th century movement, it sought for factual and realistic description of life, claiming that all religious truths were derived from nature and natural causes, and not from revelation. In art and literature, it called for close following of nature. The concept seemed to have been derived from Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest which infiltrated into literature and arts. It was even more difficult for the Negro writer to break the barrier cutting him off from the literary world. It was generally believed Negroes should be confined to physical and not menial work. Many whites, for instance believed that Negroes were not capable of producing any work of art that had merit. To conceive this, according to them was to take the Negro beyond his world. Yet, as soon as very few blacks debunked his notion, some benevolent whites began to entertain the possibility that blacks could produce arts of merit.

Richard Wright who was born in 1908 near Natchez, Mississippi is best remembered for his works dealing with twentieth century black-white relations. Wright did not have a normal sweet childhood as most children of his age had. His father

abandoned his mother and ran off with another woman. For this, the writer was raised in indigent homes and among relations of his mother. His education had to be broken off as the fortune of each of the family he had to live with fluctuated.

At the age of six, he was introduced to the saloon by drunken blacks who taught him the four letter word. These drunks gave him alcohol so much so that he became drunk himself. While in school, street boys took it on him; they beat him and snatched both the goods and money he was sent along with. But his mother knew he could not grow into a responsible adult by avoiding the street boys. She sent him back with a firm warning not to come running home in tears again. Wright took this advice, fought the boys and according to him, won his way into the streets of Memphis. Thereafter, he began to join gangs whose influence remained with him. In each school he entered, he fought.

Food was a major problem in the home of Wright. The situation was so grim that he had to steal a number of times to assuage his hunger. The deprivation in Wright's home made him hate his father and at a stage, he could have been happy if someone had killed him. As he grew older, his anger shifted to white people whom he believed were responsible for the plight of black people. He wrote in *Black Boy*:

Watching the white people eat would make my empty stomach churn and I would grow angry. Why could I not eat when I was hungry? Why did I always have to wait until others were through? I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not.
(16)

Black Boy is the autobiography that treats the first seventeen years of the life of Richard Wright. The book tackles the life of a Negro in white America and the influence of racism in determining the position of the Negro. Native Son is related to Black Boy in subject matter as it is concerned with Negro-white relationship. However, Black Boy sets the foundation on which most of Richard Wright's works are based, as it outlines that style, conflicts and the factors that control Negro life in America.

His mother, Ella Wright, played a key role in his life. After she had been abandoned by Richard Wright's father, the family faced immense tribulations. For ten years, they wandered across Mississippi, Tennessee and back to Mississippi in search of a permanent home. Richard Wright was put also in an orphanage from where he once ran away. He had altogether nine years of intermittent school life as the family was constantly relocating. He spent the first twelve years of his life like a nomad in search of a greener pasture. Yet, it must be said that these twelve years provided him with the basic materials with which he wrote.

He made it clear in his autobiographical novel Black Boy that he would not succumb to the fate of the Negro in white America. He refused to seek escape in religion like his mother and grand mother; instead he tried to redefine existence for himself. To survive, he did menial jobs in the south, but later moved to Chicago where his poverty and depression reached a feverish pitch.

His first story was published in a Negro magazine in 1931. He joined the Chicago John Reed Club during this time and in 1933 entered the communist party. In 1935, he joined the Illinois Federal Writer's Project and published a few poems and

short stories. He later moved to New York and became the editor of the Communist Paper *The Daily Worker* in 1937. In the same 1937, *Uncle Tom's Children* and four novellas were published. In 1940, *Native Son* made a heroic debut and in collaboration with the photographer, Edwin Roskham, *The 12 Million Black Voices* was published. This was a folk history of American Negro.

Richard Wright broke up with the communist party in early 1942. Prior to this date, the party had been supporting the Negro cause. But when the Nazis invaded Russia in 1940, the party began to pay little attention to the Negro plight. This was because all efforts were directed at mobilizing support for the Allied Forces. But Wright's despondency was heightened when some of the party leaders began to pass uncomplimentary remarks about *Native Son*. Edward Margolies writes in his critical work, *Native Sons*:

The final straw appears to have come when some of the party leaders privately criticized *Native Son* as being ideologically incoherent. Wright did not break with the party publicly until early 1942-and the decision was a difficult one to make. The party had provided him with a sense of history and identity he had never known before-and now he was alone again in the American racist wilderness.
(70)

Thereafter, the works of Richard Wright began to take the form of existentialism which was manifest in the works that follow in 1944, *The Man Who Lived Underground*; *Black Metropolis* and *Black Boy* (1945). In all, Wright wrote twelve books including: *The Outsider* (1953), *Savage Holiday* (1954), *The Long Dream*, *Black Power* (1954), *The Color Curtain* (1950), *White Man, Listen* (1957), *Pagan Spain* (1957). It must be stated that not all the works were successful artistically. Some have been

failures with the public. *The Outsider* and *Savage Holiday*, according to Margolis, "must be accounted artistic failures" (*Native Sons* 70). *Pagan Spain*, is considered as: "one of Wright's best journalistic efforts, however, it did not relate all to Asian and African problems, but rather to the psychology of the Spanish people, some twenty-five years after their civil war" (*Native Sons* 71).

The success of *Native Son* and the mark it makes in the social, political, economic, cultural and historical life of America establishes the name of Wright for all time. In his preface to the works of Wright, Russell Carl Brignano says:

Wright was neither a consistent refined craftsman nor a stylistic innovator. His successes are colossal, his failures dreadful. His creative efforts usually reveal first a Negro conscious of his race, second an artist committed to polished performance. However, he is a fascinating figure not only for literary critics, but also for historians, sociologists, and philosophers. (Preface X)

A number of factors combine to influence the works of the author. The first was his frustration about the treatment he received in the hands of white Americans which prompted inclination to be aggressive and an instinct to survive in a world where his race had a little chance. There was a seeming tendency in him to disapprove of others because he was ever suspicious of both whites and blacks. There was thus a pervasive tone of antagonism towards southern whites in all the works. In his novels, Wright dwelled so much on the survival of the individual. For instance, Bigger of *Native Son* committed several murders, the most monstrous being the killing of Bessie Mears, his girl friend, for survival.

However, justice and equality for all seemed his ultimate end. Margolies captures the essence in *Native Sons*:

He was, like all Americans, a creature of the American dream of justice and equality for all men, and each of his works is informed by this idea. His adoption of communism years later was only a variation of this theme. Wright did not believe that freedom could be attained under the present political conditions of American life. (67)

The writings of Richard Wright can be divided into three periods. The first was the era of naturalism when he experienced racism first hand, his indigent life, and the period when he tried to break into the literary world. The second stage was the period when he had become famous and struggled hard to defend the storm which *Native Son* and *Black Boy* had created. The third stage was the period when he went to France, married a white girl and tried to socialise with other French writers, and finally his death in 1960.

The Wrights were invited to France in late 1945 by the provisional French Government. He honoured the invitation and later settled in France permanently. A number of reasons led him to make this decision. The first was his reservations about race relations in America. The second reason was his marriage to a white woman. There was the fear that his wife may not fit into a racist American society. Another important reason was that he suspected that his past associations with the communist party would alienate him in his homeland. The final reason might even be the first. Wright was excited by the French enthusiasm for him and his subsequent integration into their culture. These were more than he had bargained for.

While in France, he became friendly with French writers and philosophers, especially existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre. The influence they exerted on him was tremendous as could be seen in *The Outsider*. Wright traveled extensively thereafter. He traveled to Spain, Indonesia, and Ghana where he met the late Kwame Nkrumah.

It is pertinent here to advance reasons why *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are chosen as case studies for this essay. First, the two novels represent the view point of Richard Wright in the white-black relations in America. Secondly, the two novels convey very vividly, Wright's naturalistic tendencies which are the main concern of this chapter.

In New York, Alfred Knopf led other white publishers in identifying and promoting black literary talents. During this period, black writers had to court white publishers to get both their approval and their publishing contracts. It must, however, be noted that the prevalent world chaos helped also to stifle black publications: the turbulent political times in the United State after the first world war, the Bolshevik revolution and the anti-colonial movements that were gradually taking root elsewhere in the world.

As the knowledge of blacks of world experience improved, more Negroes began to reflect their experiences in writing. While some wanted literature to be used as a weapon for civil-right struggles, majority favoured race consciousness and racial pride to remain in black literature. William E. Burghardt Du Bois did his best to promote black interest in the middle class and to get blacks to forget the consistent inclination towards the ghetto.

There are many significant black writers whose contributions to Negro literature cannot be glossed over. They include Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Levi Jones, Claude McKay, Frederick Douglass, Allan Locke and others. Richard Wright stands out for his obsession with transgression against convention. His heroes do not have any remorse for breaking the law. They are rather afraid of punishment which the institution can give.

In the *Invincible Man*, Ellison explores the ironic actions and the ambivalent situations of blacks in America. For William E. Burghardt Du Bois, Negroes can find expression in world wide organizations. In *Dark Princess*, he describes the umbrella by which blacks operated: National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the Pan African Congress. Du Bois also believes that the Negro masses cannot enhance their status without the assistance of intellectual elite. Du Bois shows that clearly in the *Souls of Black Folk*.

Some Negro writers have sought to explain the pathetic condition of their race through sex. Chester Himes belongs to this tradition. Although his books are in naturalistic tradition, they still retain the quest for love. Margolies says this of him:

It is true as well that he appears to be devoted more and more to his work to material hitherto regarded as taboo-inter racial love. Perhaps Himes feels, like so many other Negro authors and intellectuals, that underlying the structure of American society is an unresolved residue of erotic racial quilts that manifests itself among other ways, "the Negro problem".(9)

In his two novels, *If He Hollers let Him Go* and *Lonely Crusade*, Himes explores the theme of sex, but he is at his best

in the character, Lee Gordon. Gordon plays between his black wife and white mistress. His relationship gravitates between love and hate for this white woman who could lead his life to an unpleasant end.

In all respects, black writers have been able to put forward slavery as an inheritance that created both environmental problems and racial crisis. The tone is even stronger in Richard Wright. To see the influence and what Wright has been able to do for his race, it is pertinent to see what James A. Emanuel and L. Gross say of him:

Richard Wright was the first twentieth-century writer to deal decisively with the economic and moral problems of the Negro as they existed in the Ghetto. His concentration upon subjugation, alienation, violence, and frustration is similar to that of subsequent authors who have used Wright's achievement as literary touchstone and a point of departure. Moreover, Wright's evaluation from an intellectually barren childhood in Mississippi to a sophisticated maturity in Chicago, New York, and Paris encourages later Negro writers; for it was a cultural journey accomplished through Wright's tenacious will and ambition through his determination not to be defeated by his environment. (222)

THE EFFECT OF NATURALISM ON THE MINOR CHARACTERS

The minor characters in the *Native Son* and *Black Boy* are certainly victims of the environment. The environment and other social forces combine to put the characters in the situation they find themselves. Various characters in these novels illustrate this point. It is perhaps for this reason that Ruth Miller,

In Black American Literature, notices the emphasis on this motif in Richard Wright's novels:

Whatever system that he advocated for the restoration of social justice, one idea pervades his Writing: that the root of evil does lie in the society, never in the man. The worst man is retrievable; pariah or parasite, he may be restored, the predator, the outcast, the hopeless, the helpless-all may be saved. But there are degrees of outrage, there are degrees of victimization, and the Blackman has suffered a burden of afflictions beyond the reach of reason. (426)

The plight of the Negro thus takes primacy in the works of Wright. The author underscores this idea at the very beginning of *Native Son* when Bigger Thomas's mother exclaims "We couldn't have lived in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you" (3).

The minor characters in *Native Son* include Bigger's mother, Buddy, G.H, Mary Dalton, Jan Erlone, Peggy, Mr. and Mrs. Dalton. Although they do not feature as much as Bigger, Max and Bessie, their contributions are to the overall development of the plot and necessary for the realization of the theme. The ever presence of pots and the rats, the squalor they live in and the choking condition of life of the Thomas's make Bigger's mother see no better future but utmost suffering.

The opening passage in which Mrs. Thomas prophesies Bigger's doom captures the mood of tragedy that results in the final cataclysm. She feels so exasperated with their condition of life that she begins to wish that God would call back her soul. Then she warns Bigger:

"You'll regret how you living some day" she went on. "If you don't stop running with that gang of yours and do right you'll end up where you never thought you would. You think I don't know what you boys is doing, but I do. And the gallows is at the end of the road you traveling boy. Just remember that". (13)

But the woman is helpless. The social condition makes Bigger to steal and she partakes of the proceeds. Mrs. Thomas settles between her conscience and the hard reality or the wickedness of the society she lives in and the tenets of her God. Her despondency reaches a climax when she says:

"Vera sometimes I just want to lay down and quit"

"Ma, please don't say".

"I can't last many more years living like this."

"I'll be old enough to work soon". (2)

Both Vera and her mother see family co-operation as a possible antidote to the black crisis. But the social laws that insist on the attainment of a certain age before one can earn a living will not be compromised. All menial jobs are open to blacks and the pay is insufficient to support the family. The result is that the Negro is constantly hungry and his life glides over the very basic or vagaries of life to the fear of white people. Both Gus and G.H see no future in American society. They live by robbing, not whites but their fellow Negroes. They rob Negroes because they see it as less dangerous because white police men never really search diligently for Negroes who rob Negroes.

After killing Mary Dalton, Bigger gives his friends cigarettes and receives their approbation. Yet, Bigger sees how blind they are, how utterly helpless they are in the society. Before coming to consciousness, Bigger plays white and military characters with them. Through such practices, they escape realism. According to Edward Margolis in *Native Sons*:

But Wright shows that all of Bigger's waking existence is a kind of meaninglessness- a kind of death. In the morning Bigger loiters on the street with members of his gang and plots (fearfully) to rob a white man's store. Later he goes to a movie and sits through a banal Hollywood double bill. Wright here shows how the glitter of the great white world beyond titillates Bigger and at the same time frustrates him all the more. When Bigger returns from the movie he has a savage fight in a pool room with one of the co-conspirators in the proposed robbery. (Native Sons 74)

The life of Bigger is not very different from that of Gus and G.H. Gus sees Bigger as a bully, but Bigger sees violence as the only option towards acquiring both confidence and a living, as the only means of forgetting his sorrows, his emptiness in a society that does not want him. When Bigger wants to rob Blum, he thinks of violence as the only way to put away the gang and take the Dalton's job. So, he fights Gus to avenge on his peer what the society he lives in denies and visits on him. On the contrary, Buddy the younger brother of Bigger Thomas, is contented to live in the American society in which he finds himself. Although he does not like the squalid condition of his existence, he does not violently seek its overthrow. He wants a job like an average black young man. He wants to drive white people around as Bigger does. He sees it as having arrived, the ultimate vision of black people. He, in addition wants to share Bigger's confidence but the latter does not allow him. Bigger sees him as blind too. He feels that Buddy is incapable of seeing a world where black will challenge white supremacy. He feels sorry for him, but could not bring himself to share his inner secrets.

Bessie Mears belongs to the generation of blacks who prefer to maintain the status quo. She connives with Bigger, like other blacks, to rob their white masters and mistresses. But she challenges Bigger's right to take life even if the person concerned is white. She consistently probes him, wants to know his inner secrets. But Bessie is not ignorant of the condition of blacks. She lives alone, and serves in white homes. Her only pleasure comes when Bigger gives her liquor and then makes love to her. Her life gravitates between servitude, liquor, and sex. Bigger knows that the only way to keep her is to buy her drinks and when she is intoxicated, makes love to her. He knows also that if he fails to provide these necessities, someone else will and take her way from him. Bigger finds Bessie a reluctant conspirator in the bid to extort money from the Daltons. According to Margolies:

... Bigger realizes Bessie is at best an unenthusiastic conspirator, and decides he must kill her or she will some day reveal his whereabouts to the police. He makes love to her and after she has gone to sleep smashes her head with a brick. The monstrosity of the second murder exhilarates Bigger all the more.
(77)

On the other hand, some whites are sympathetic to the plight of the Negroes. Among these are Mrs. Dalton, her daughter Mary, and the communist Jan Erlone. But Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone could not change the American society for the better. As communists, Jan and Mary see the growing chasm between white and black as a time bomb that will later confound the American society. So they seek to diffuse it by encouraging black revolution. They see black rebellion as a mitigating ploy that will reduce the violence of racism and its future growth.

But Jan, Mary and Bigger belong to different worlds: one of black and the other two of white. Despite Mary and Jan's efforts to bridge the gap in-between the two worlds, Bigger could not find a comfortable platform. On their way to Ernie's kitchen where Jan takes over the wheels and Bigger is sandwiched between them; he could not contain his feeling of fear and embarrassment. Bigger sees Jan and Mary as blind. They could not see the monster which the American society has made of him. They rely on communism and the dictates of conscience while Bigger sees violence and murder as the only solution to the black problem.

All the minor Negro characters in the novel have been conditioned by environment and inherited biological traits to accept the condition of servitude.

In *Black Boy* as in *Native Son*, social and biological forces condition both major and minor characters. Unlike *Native Son* however, *Black Boy* features numerous characters that have come to terms with their situation. There are, however, some exceptions; those who seem to be comfortable with their situation under the whites.

Ella the coloured girl accepts the status quo and is not ready to be the instrument of rebellion. "Your grandmother wouldn't like it if I talked to you about novels," she told me. But Richard presses her hard but she insists:

"When you grow up, you'll read books and know what's in them", she explained.

"But I want to know now". She thought a while, then closed the book.

"Come here", she said. I sat at her feet and lifted my face to hers. "Once upon a time there was an old, old man named Bluebird", she began in a low voice. (*Black Boy* 47)

She tells Richard the story of Bluebird and his seven wives. Like she prophesied, his grand mother dislikes it. She slaps Richard and tells Ella not to tell him further stories:

“You stop that, you evil gal”, she shouted.

“I want none of that Devil stuff in my house”. (Black Boy 47)

For the insistent Richard, she says “You are going to burn in hell”, she says with such furious conviction that for a moment, the young Richard believes her. Mrs. Wilson's attitude later sows and proves her fears. Richard vows to rekindle the interest when he must have grown up. Thereafter he begins to buy all the novels he could afford, first to engrave in himself a literary interest and secondly to satisfy the violence in him. Thus Ella sows the first literary interest in the author. But she has little ambition and her efforts in the black dilemma come close to mere storm in a tea-cup.

In the case of Mrs. Wilson, the grandmother of Richard Wright, the story is slightly different. She belongs to a different world. She is content to allow the whites have their way. She prefers to pray and see all situations in life in line with the scriptures. Any story that is not Christian is heathen. She does her best to support her daughter and grand-children which helps greatly to reduce the itinerant movement of the Wrights. Yet, she is blind to Richard. Her actions help to foster the white domination of blacks. But she could not have this.

When Mrs. Wilson is bathing her grand son all she wants is to wipe him clean. But she does not see the extent of his contamination. So, when Richard, having graduated from the saloon as a drunk at the age of six, tells her to kiss his ass, she turns blue. She hits Richard hard. But she could not see the relationship between his perversities and acquired dirty traits as the problem of the southern Negro:

No matter how hard I tried to convince them that I had not read the words in a book or that I could not remember having heard anyone say them, they would not believe me. Granny finally charged Ella with telling me things that I should not know and Ella, weeping and distraught, packed her things and moved. The tremendous upheaval that my words had caused made me know that there lay back of them much more than I could figure out, and I resolved that in the future I would learn the meaning of why they had beat and denounced me. (Black Boy 53)

The situation of Grandpa Wilson is pathetic. As a demobilized soldier, he comes close to a demented state as he waits patiently for the civil war to resume. His little education, like those of most blacks, is his greatest undoing. His pride and lofty lifestyle keep him away from reality and he remains so until death. The little interest shown by the white American government takes away the life in many blacks.

The case of uncle Hoskins deserves in-depth comment. Like Richard, he rejects the prescribed role which the white Americans laid down for blacks. He escapes the naturalistic environment by running successfully a liquor store against the wishes of whites. After persistent threats, he refuses to yield to pressure to take to menial jobs. In the end, he pays with his life. When he dies, Auntie Maggie could neither see his body nor claim his assets. The white mob plunders this delicate nuclear family and leaves it to die of penury and diseases. The killing of uncle Hoskins, like the killing of many blacks, passes unnoted. When Hoskins is killed at Arkansas, his family has no alternative than to flee. In other words, when the white mob raises its instrument of death, blacks cower in submission:

I learned afterwards that uncle Hoskins had been killed by whites who had long coveted his flourishing liquor business. He had been threatened with death and warned many times to leave, but he had wanted to hold on a while longer to amass more money...

There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning. There were no flowers. There were only silence, quiet weeping, whispers, and fear. I did not know when or where uncle Hoskins was buried. Aunt Maggie was not even allowed to see his body nor was she able to claim any of his assets. Uncle Hoskins had simply been plucked from our midst and we, figuratively, had fallen on our faces to avoid looking into that white-hot face of terror that we knew loomed somewhere above us. (64-65)

White threat is a recurring motif. Unlike uncle Hoskins who has his revolver within reach when he sleeps, Professor Matthew chooses to be on the run. When he is sought for murder, he seeks refuge with the Wilsons who also harbour Maggie, Richard and his family. The life of Professor Matthew in *Black Boy* is like that of Mann in his short story "Dawn by the River". Richard Wright explains how Mann is killed after shooting to death a white man. Mann is the central character and he kills to save another. His wife, Lulu, is pregnant but does not get to deliver the baby before she dies also. Professor Matthew, like Mann, is an example of growing black violent figures in white America. They murder, then seek asylum only to be caught and visited with justice- white justice. This account of Professor Matthew's violent act is as monstrous as Mary Dalton's murder in *Native Son*:

"But what did you do?" Aunty Maggie asked. "I'll tell you later", "Uncle" said. "We got to get out of here

before they come" "But you've done something terrible". Aunt Maggie said. "Or you wouldn't be running like this." "The house is on fire" uncle said. "And when they see it, they'll know who did it. "Did you set the house afire?" My mother asked. "There was nothing else to do", uncle said impatiently. "I took the money. I had hit her. She was unconscious. If they found her, she'd tell. I'd be lost. So I set the fire". "But she'll burn up," Aunt Maggie said, crying into her hands. "What could I do?" uncle asked. "I had to do it. I couldn't just leave her there and let somebody find her. They'd know somebody hit her. But if she burns, nobody'll ever know". (Black Boy 76-77)

The roles of Aunt Addie can be best seen in the religion where she seeks escape. The relationship between Addie and Richard is not in the best of terms. When the author starts his literary career, and writes the short story "The Voodoo of Hall's Half Acre", it wins the publisher's approbation, but Addie's disapproval. Aunt Addie says it is a sin to use the word "hell". She contends that Richard uses it because he is not properly guided. She blames the usage on his bad upbringing. The short story, however, attracts the envy of his classmates who seek to put him out of commission at the least opportunity. Even his class teacher begins to infer that he is asking too many questions. Some of his classmates, in an attempt to control him begin to shout "keep quiet". But the hostility does not kill the literary interest; instead it helps to accentuate it. The author describes his relationship with Aunt Addie in this language:

Aunt Addie took her defeat hard, holding me in a cold and silent disdain. I was conscious that she had descended to my own emotional level in her effort to rule me, and my respect for her sank. Until she married, years later, we rarely spoke to each other,

though we ate at the same table and slept under the same roof, though I was but a skinny, half frightened boy and she was the secretary of the church and the church's school teacher. God bless our home with the love that bind. (121)

Uncle Tom is literarily a symbolic figure who enjoys or accepts the place of servitude assigned to him by whites. He is in fact a symbol of a black who is ready to accept the status quo and submit to white reign. The name is a descendant of Beecher Stowe's, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* who is seen as a complacent black who co-operates with whites. Similarly, Uncle Tom in the *Black Boy* represents the older order which supports the prevailing system. Although he has never been helpful to Richard, he is not happy that Richard is toeing a rebellious line. So, he attempts to whip him into line with the cane. Richard resents and refuses to submit to the corporal punishment. The author recounts his ordeal at the time:

I felt weak all over. How long was this going to last? How long was I going to be beaten for trifles and less than trifles? I was already so conditioned toward my relatives that when I passed them I actually had a nervous fit in my muscles, and now I was going to be beaten by someone who did not like the tone of voice in which I spoke. I ran across the room and pulled out the dresser drawer and got my pack of razor blades; I opened it and took a thin blade of blue steel in each hand. I stood ready for him. The door opened. I was hoping desperately that this was not true, that this dream would end. (*Black Boy* 174)

On the other hand, the white characters adopt or support racism. Except in the exceptional case of Jan, Mary and Mr.

Falk who allows Richard to borrow books from the library with his card, most of the characters foster racial growth. For instance, when the brickyard white boss dog bites Richard, the Whiteman does not show any sympathy. When he examines Richard, he merely laughs: "A dog bite can't hurt a Niger", he says. Refusing to treat Richard, he tells him to inform him if the wound hurts.

The position of blacks becomes clearer as Richard moves from one job to another. His attempts to assert his position are always greeted with immediate sack action. In the end, Griggs finds a job for him, but not until he has handed over to him a severe warning to be of good behaviour. This good behaviour entails utmost submissiveness and acceptance of white reign. Richard obeys. But Reynolds, Peace and Mr. Crane will not let him live the newly acquired way of life. Soon black ambition rears its ugly head in him. In the optical company, for a black to aspire to be a skilled worker is against the design of the white man. So, when Richard desires to acquire the skill, he gets a good beating to soften him, and a voluntary withdrawal of service despite all the efforts of the owner of the factory to retain him. Richard seeks the safest way out; to get paid off. Reynolds tells Richard if he were born black he would kill himself.

The grand hostility that is everywhere present forces Richard to escape northwards. He could no longer tolerate Southern racism. Yet since there is no money, he has to steal from a film house to do this. He makes enough to see him up to Memphis, Tennessee, in a cold November Sunday morning. In 1925, Richard makes his way into Beale Street in Memphis. Mrs. Moss and her daughter, Bess, welcome him with open arms. The offer is not without some conditions though. Bess wants the seventeen-year old Richard for a husband and her mother

wants grand children fast. The children are so needed that the family business could be ceded if need be. But the naive Richard, who has never nurtured a relationship before lets the affair to slip away by not co-operating. But his naivety and lack of co-operation will have a cost. He faces immediate approval to move out of the house and later re-acceptance to continue to lodge. This first baptism edges Richard to be on his guard, especially as a distressed child with a long standing history of poverty.

In status, the Moss's come close to middle class by blacks' rating. But they are supporters of the status quo. Although they are optimistic that things might change for blacks, they are however not ready to be apostles of this change. Bess tells Richard. "I wanna love". The love for a family life without risks of white threats fills her world. With little education, vision, tact and zeal, Bess sheds off the floundering collective destiny of blacks and extends her hands to collect her fair share of what her parents could provide by pawning it with Richard's love. This state of affairs worries Richard:

Had a black boy announced that he aspired to be a writer, he would have been unresistingly called crazy by his pals. Or had a black boy spoken of yearning to get a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, his friends-in the boy's own interest-would have reported his odd ambition to the white boss. (Black Boy 24)

The case of Harrison is pathetic. Conditioned by the environment and doing menial jobs like other blacks, he is pitched against Richard by Mr. Olim. Mr. Olim sets Richard and Harrison against each other, each believing that the other is plotting to kill him. Both blacks begin to come to work with a knife, after an initial period of stalking. In the end, a boxing

contest is arranged, despite the obvious knowledge that each is living a lie. They are both set up where they beat themselves black and blue. Lamenting these schemes by whites, Richard says:

The game of egging Harrison and me to fight, to cut each other, kept up for a week. We were afraid to tell the white men that we did not believe them, for that would have been tantamount to calling them liars or risking an argument that might have ended in violence being directed against us. (Black Boy 262)

Shorty is the greatest jackass of the whole lot. He does not have an iota of self respect. He crouches in the meanest way possible and accepts all the insults that Richard resists. He is the acceptable nigger per excellence. Richard has no patience with him. He feels he is the greatest obstacle to the liberation of his race.

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURALISM ON THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas, Boris Max and Bessie Mears may, in one sense, be called major characters, while Richard Wright and his parents are the main actors in *Black Boy*. In Bigger Thomas, Wright creates a monster, a blood thirsty Negro whose instinct for survival transcends that of his neighbours. Edward Margolies gives an opinion when he says:

...Bigger Thomas unlike the usual array of proletarian victims, is thoroughly the anti-hero. He is not simply weak; he is an outright coward. He is incapable of warmth, love or loyalty, he is a sullen bully, and he enjoys his first range of humanity and freedom only after he commits two brutal murders. (*Native Sons* 72)

It may be difficult to accept Margolies' view because Bigger Thomas is an American creation. He is a victim of the society and he fights his creator with all the forces at his disposal. From the outset, the narrator makes it clear that the social system has dehumanized Bigger. He sees white people in his stomach, in his throat, and their influence looms large in the society. His mother worries herself to almost a point of hysteria wondering if he would take the Dalton's job until he can fight to protect it. He justifies his action when he says:

All one had to do was be bold, do something nobody thought of. The whole thing came to him in the form of a powerful and simple feeling; there was in everyone a great hunger to believe that made him blind, and if he could see while others were blind, then he could get what he wanted and never be caught at it. Now, who on earth would think that he, a black timid Negro boy, would murder and burn a rich white girl and would sit and wait for his breakfast like this? Elation filled him. (Native Son 102)

His life is a series of warfare and he sees the next person as a potential enemy. In the home of the Daltons, while he is talking to Mrs. Dalton, it is clear he does not know what he wants, what he will like to be or whether he will like to go to school:

"How far did you say you went in school, Bigger?"

"To the eight grade, mam"

"Did you ever think of going back?"

"Well, I gotta work now, mam"

"Suppose you had the chance to go back?"

"Well, I don't know, mam."

"The last man who worked here went to night school and got education."

"Yessum".

"What would you want to be if you had education?"

"I don't know, mam."

"Did you ever think about it?"

"No'm."

"You would rather work?"

(Native Son 53)

Bigger did not want to go to school. Organized life is beyond the Negro, because he lives in a world where what matters is what will go into the stomach, how to satisfy the immediate need. The life of the Negro in America is an unplanned one. Because he is never given the opportunity, it is difficult to plan against a future that does not exist. Bigger's fear of white people, like that of an average black man in America, is excessive. He could not shake Jan on their first meeting and he feels odd amongst them despite his assurances and their journey to a black neighbourhood to eat at Ernie's kitchen shack. Bigger feels odd all the way, and his psychological balance never returns even when he has seen Bessie who is as much afraid as he of white people. Bigger's fear of white people is of a strange kind. It imbues him with a psychological feeling that suspends him between white and black world. In the presence of whites, we are told that:

He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No MAN'S land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent... (Native Son 214)

Before the case of Mary Dalton, Bigger had killed many blacks. But it is Mary's murder that he feels he has accomplished something. His confidence improves and he sees his folks with a difference, with different eyes. His values have changed. Before the murder is traced to him, he sees everyone, including Jan and the Daltons, as blind. He does not feel sorry for Mary after killing her. Mary is not real and he does not see her as a human being. He feels that the shame and fear he experiences have justified her murder. By killing her, he feels he has shed a burden off his head. He sees Mary Dalton as a part of a system that is oppressing him. To kill her is to remove this oppression and he feels a psychological relief after the act.

Through the actions of Bigger Thomas, the reader perceives that the black man is drawn away from both the religion and the folk culture of his race. This can be seen in Bigger's endless search for a job, his search through the movies for self identity and satisfaction. When he picks the Dalton's job, he symbolically enters as a primitive force operating between two worlds and yet identifying more with that of the Negro. He is that black man who refuses to accept the place created for him by whites. He takes his fate in his own hands and is destroyed by a force that is greater than his own.

In the end, fate catches up with Bigger, and he has to go by the way of those who fight a powerful system. Edmund Margolies describes the mood of Bigger when luck turns its back on him:

Immediately after his capture, Bigger reverts to his pose of sullen apathy. But Max's genuine efforts to help and understand him awaken in Bigger a vague sense of hope and trust in men. He needs Max and looks forward to his visits. He knows the jury will doom him, but this does not disturb him very much. Throughout the agony of his trial, Bigger has been trying to puzzle through the meaning of his life and world. (Native Sons 79)

In *Black Boy*, the fear, frustration, hatred and internal rage of the narrator are everywhere present. The book gives an account of the first seventeen years of his life by flashing or throwing light on the pre-Marxist and pre-Northern period. Although the book dwells on the fate of the black man in white America, Russell Carl Brignano, in his *Richard Wright: An Introduction to the Man and His Works* believes that: "... It is also a sensitive quest for self discovery. The search for respectable and safe place in American society for Wright... for Negroes in general-is accompanied by a painful need for both a vocation and a father" (*An Introduction* 5).

The author realizes quite painfully that he is a Negro and that his status is ranked at a sub-human level. He fights against this and seeks an amicable environment for the American Negro. To accomplish this, he runs northwards but still finds the same environment but at a more tolerable level.

The narrator in *Black Boy* makes an issue out of the restlessness of youths. He emphasizes it to bring out what it could cost a black boy. His white counterpart has no such inhibition or disadvantage. He lives in a natural setting where almost everything is provided for him. There seems to be a dividing wall as rigidly erected as the Berlin walls. But Wright violates this and in his own words says:

"I crossed restlessly to the window and pushed back the fluffy white curtains -which I had been forbidden to touch-and looked yearningly out into the empty street". (*Black Boy* 3)

In the beginning, the hero has no eye or ear for race distinction. But he comes to know of it when the white Arkansas mob kills his uncle and they flee the town. This gives him the first hand information about how white people take black people, and what they can do to his people. This account of the narrator brings the message home:

"Mr. Hoskins... he done been shot. Done been shot by a white man", the boy gasped.

"Mrs. Hoskins, he dead." Aunt Maggie screamed and rushed off the porch and down the dusty road into the night. "Maggie" my mother screamed. "Don't you-all go to that saloon", The boy called. "Maggie" my mother called running after Aunt Maggie.

"They'll kill you if you go there" the boy yelled. "White folks say they'll kill all his kinfolks" my mother pulled Aunt Maggie back to the house. Fear drowned our grief and that night we packed clothes and dishes and loaded them into a farmer's wagon. Before dawn, we were rolling away, fleeing for our lives. (Black Boy 62)

With this, Wright forms an opinion. Russell Carl Brignano sums up the hero's feeling thus:

"The youthful Wright began to perceive whites not as real persons but as parts of a general, abhorrent and potentially destructive force". (An introduction 9) With hatred and threats of whites challenge, Wright begins to dream of a retaliatory action against his enemy and those of his people.

During the author's painful search for a job, he sees how the Negro labours. He also sees that a Negro could only keep his job if he hides his sense of outrage with a cheerful subservience. To show any form of resentment is to stand a chance of being visited with violence, injury, death, or incitement of whites against him. Before he picks up another job at a drug store, Richard records his experience of weeks of joblessness:

For weeks after that I could not believe in my feelings. My personality was numb, reduced to a lumpish, loose, dissolved state. I was a no-man, something that knew vaguely that it was human but

felt that it was not. As time separated me from the experience, I could feel no hate for the men who had driven me from the job. They did not seem to be individual men, but part of a huge, implacable, elemental design toward which hate was futile. What I did feel was a longing to attack. But how?... I went to bed tired and got up tired, though I was having no exercise. (Black Boy 213)

The instinct of survival for the Negro is very strong in America. To survive, the Negro finds a way. According to Brignano: Ways and means were found to cheat white men behind their backs, to gain triumphs great in black men's eyes but hardly noticed as victories by the whites. For example, a teen-aged Wright engaged himself in such illegal activities as stealing money from his employer in a movie box office and bootie legging liquor into a hotel where he worked as a bell boy. (An Introduction 10)

But this recourse to petty stealing merely helps to re-enforce the white man's distrust of black people. Yet, funny as this may sound, this is what the white man expects from blacks and he is happy about it. Through this, he knows he still has power over him, that the black man is dependent on him for his existence:

No Negro in my environment had ever thought of organizing, no matter in how orderly a fashion, and petitioning their white employers for higher wages. The very thought would have been terrifying to them and they knew that the whites would have retaliated with brutality. So, pretending to conform to the laws of the whites, grinning, bowing, they let their fingers stick to what they could touch. And the whites seemed to like it. (Black Boy 219)

The author also shows how white hegemony is maintained. Pressures are put on Negroes and once they aspire to higher skills, whites conspire against them. If the Negro persists, threats are made on his life. Wright has this experience with Jackson at the Mississippi optical firm. After threats to his life, he is forced to leave and do another menial job. Even a reactionary like Griggs, who later finds another job for him advises him to seek a lowly state so as to keep a job. The hero finds this pathetic and a submission to a culture of indolence, complacency and negativity. The author takes a position and states his case:

My objections to stealing were not moral. I did not approve of it because I knew that, in the long run, it was futile. That it was not an effective way to alter one's environment. Then, how could I change my relationship to my environment? Almost my entire salary went to feed the eternally hungry stomachs at home. (Black Boy 219)

LITERARY STYLE

Richard Wright is more interested in the message than in the medium. His works are written for the masses, to educate the masses on the Negro's plight. Although there are extensive use of symbols, metaphors, alliteration and other literary devices, the author allows his art to carry him often to the realm of a crusade. There is a penetrating frankness which remains with the reader long after he has read the work. Of all his works, *Native Son* enjoys a unique privilege of being the most proletarian. Edward Margolies in assessing this writes:

With the exception of Bigger, none of the characters is portrayed in any depth, and most are depicted as representative "types" of the social class to which they belong. Despite his brutally conditioned psychology, there was moment in the novel when Bigger, like the heroes of other proletarian fiction, appears to be on the

verge of responding to the stereotyped communist vision of the black and white workers marching together in the sunlight of fraternal friendship. Finally, Wright succumbs too often to the occupational disease of proletarian authors by hammering home sociological points in didactic expository prose when they could be understood just clearly in terms of the organic development of the novel. (Native Son 72)

In making this observation, Margolies implies that the world view of Wright is determined by communist vision and sociological traits. These features are prevalent in the works of Wright and they give his works a peculiar colour.

Native Son is both a psychological and a sociological novel. The author tries to present in a sympathetic tone one of the most disagreeable characters in fiction. He tries to communicate thoughts that the inarticulate and illiterate Bigger cannot express. In an attempt to express his hero's thoughts, he presents accurate picture of Bigger's emotions. Margolies on this declares:

Finally, there is the style. Since the viewpoint throughout is that of illiterate and inarticulate Bigger, Wright had to discover a means of communicating thoughts and feelings Bigger is unable to express. At times Wright frankly interprets them to the reader, but often he reveals them in objectified images of Bigger's environment-the way the streets look to him, the feel of the sleet and the snow against his skin, the sounds of a rat rustling in the darkness of a tenement-and in dispassionate, unadorned accounts of Bigger's movements which in themselves give an accurate picture of Bigger's emotions. (Native Son 73)

The style of Richard Wright is basically simple. The language moves with grace, in imaginative and lucid prose and the reader is carried along. The tone is controlled, yet filled with hate and anger, against whites and by implication all oppressors all over the world. Wright's indignation is prevalent in all his works. He is a Negro and is out to protect his race.

The author uses appropriate symbols and imageries. For instance, Bigger begins the day by killing a rat and ends the day by killing Mary Dalton. His career begins and ends with death, symbolically speaking. His life, according to Wright, is a kind of meaninglessness, a kind of death. In the morning, Bigger loiters on the street with members of his gang and plots to rob a white man's store. Later, he goes to a movie, and sits through a charade that merely excites and does not solve his problem.

In the same way, in *Black Boy*, Richard and his family are always on the move, from one street and city to another. The street acts as a symbolic path of flight from one southern city to another until the flight to the north. The curtains in *Black Boy* symbolically represent a dividing line between white and black people. When Wright, in his youthfulness, pushes them aside, he is venturing into the white world. The southern whites have established severe penalties for blacks scaling the hurdle. Curious and bold, Wright violates this but meets, to his chagrin, a danger across the line. He hates the Negroes who stay behind, who do not take risks.

Moreover, the grotesque scene where Bigger is chasing the rat in their one-room apartment is symbolic in another sense. The rat will later be interchanged, in the minds of whites with the Negroes in general. Bigger then is later to assume the role of a hunted animal. The early scene where the gang discusses the possibility of flying a plane is also symbolic. It brings out clearly the curtain dividing the two worlds. Gus confirms this when he says: "Them white boys sure can fly." And Bigger offers an

explanation: "Yes... they get a chance to do everything" (Native Son 14). But Bigger defines segregation when he says:

"Goddamit, look: we live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we aint. They do things and we can't. It is just like living in jail." (Native Son 17)

Bigger is an archetypal symbol of the Nigger. He represents its intimidated image as well as the crude primitive force. He is the scum that represents the black race since they became slaves. In Bigger, Wright creates a hero, a monster and a metaphor that will occupy an everlasting place in American literature. According to Russell Carl Brignano, "Bigger is a prefiguration of the existential hero Cross Damon in Wright's *The Outsider*" (1953). Although Bigger is stationed outside the Negro folk culture, he carries within him the fears, hatreds and frustrations of the black culture". (An Introduction 33)

Native Son moves around primitive symbols such as the sun, water, wind and fire. The main character proceeds through the experiences of a normal primitive Negro in America. Bigger sees the killing of Mary Dalton as a creation, a relieving of tension. Although the death is an accident, it is evidently a very primitive act. The other murders he carries out help to accentuate the notion that Bigger's human feeling has reached the nadir in the course of the proceedings. And since Bigger, in Wright's opinion, is representing the Negro in America, his tale is metaphorically a collective Negro tale, the epic of the Negro, which symbolizes a collective decision.

The art which Wright creates has been described as honest, dreadful and heart -breaking. In his style, he does not imitate anyone. Yet, he leans towards the psychologist, sociologist, and social activist. He dissects the causes of savagery in man and transmits these in raw form to literature. Donald Gibson, taking a holistic view of the works of Wright, declares:

He was no dedicated craftsman, like Hemingway; no novelist-philosopher, like Sartre and Camus; no brilliant stylistic innovator, like Joyce and Faulkner. His talent was to smite the conscience – and to smite the conscience of both white and black Americans. Whites read him and lamented, “Is this what our democracy has done?” Negroes read him and quavered, “Is this us”. (Five Black Writers 5)

One of the hallmarks of Wright’s creation is the careful and appropriate use of the speech patterns and dialects of southern Negroes and whites. Apart from the deep aesthetic value they add to his works, they bring the character to the level of reality. For instance, shortly before going to take the Dalton’s job after a fight with Gus, Bigger has this dialogue with his mother:

“That you, Bigger?” his mother called from behind the curtain.

“Yea”, he said.

“What you run in here and run out for, a little while ago? Don’t you go and get into no trouble, now boy”.

“Aw, Ma Leave me alone”. (Native Son 42)

The scene of frustration and despair created by this apt language foreshadows the horrible murder scene that will later follow.

Wright’s use of metaphor is in line with white-black relations. He uses “blindness” as a symbol. Blindness to Bigger is ability to see what others do not see. Murder converts him and gives him self esteem and he sees himself towering above others. He is insensitive to Negro life and the humanity of whites. For instance, he finds it difficult to accept Jan’s hand of friendship because he sees all whites as oppressors.

Metaphor is also an essential instrument in the works of Wright as he dissects the Negro-white relationship in America. Bigger sees his family and even Buddy as blind. The metaphor can be extended in the way Bigger sees even the well-meaning Daltons. Edward Margolies says this of it:

Bigger's new vision enables him to see how blind whites are to his humanity, his existence. Whites prefer to think of Negroes in easily stereotyped images of brute beast or happy minstrel. They are incapable of viewing black men as possessing sensitivity and intelligence. It is this blindness that Bigger counts on as the means of getting away with his crimes. When he schemes with Bessie to collect ransom money from the Daltons, he tells her: "They think the Reds is doing it. They won't think we did. They don't think we got enough guts to do it. They think the nigger is too sacred ..." (Native Sons 84)

The blindness of the Daltons as they lavish money on Negro colleges and welfare institutions is also the "blindness of the white liberal philanthropic community". Margolies further submits:

The style of Wright can also be seen in the sheer delight the tale creates. In *Native Son*, the monstrous manner Bigger kills Mary, the nature of the protagonist as an illiterate, naive black boy who has the courage to kill a rich white girl, the suspense of the flight, the pursuit of Bigger up to the roof top and his eventual capture give the work of Wright an extraordinary power. Although the author relies too heavily on the sociological, which tends to diminish the artistic quality of his art, his manner of approach makes his work very appealing. He has tremendous literary power and astonishing eye for details. His language is grim and

unassuming. Donald Gibson commenting on this says:
"He had no eye for fun; nor ear or tongue for jest. In public-and his books were public-he took the world and all men as he took himself, with grim seriousness."
(Five Black Writers 3)

He has no patience with whites who oppress blacks and he fires at them constantly. Through his autobiographical novel, Wright gives details and real life events. But the essentials of Wright's art are the creations of heroes who break conventions and are non-conformists. The clash with public institutions and family ties are regular features. In agreeing with the above, Donald Gibson says:

One of the countless ways in which Richard Wright differs from Ellison, Baldwin and Hughes (but not too much from Jones) is in his obsession with the idea of transgression against convention. Without exception the protagonists of his five novels step outside the boundaries of convention and the plots of these novels, the progression and resolutions of the plots, all depend upon the effects resulting from breaches of conventions. The same is true of the majority of the short stories and even of the autobiographical *Black Boy*. (Five Black Writers XII)

The characters have no regret for breaking conventions or for violating the rights of others. Instead, they fear punishment and aftermath of their actions.

The use of alliterative words is everywhere abundant in the works of Wright. Just before the discovery of Mary's bones, the author makes liberal use of it: "There was a scuffle of feet. Bigger felt the icy wind of the night sweep over him and he discovered that he was wet with sweat. Somehow something had happened and now things were out of his hands". (382)

In the same way when Bigger is alone in his cell, condemned and ready for the hang man, the author shows his class: "Frantically, his mind sought to fuse his feelings with the world about him, but he was no nearer to knowing than ever. Only his black body lay here on the cot, wet with the sweat of agony". (Native Son, 383)

His thoughts as he contemplates his new employment are alliterated:

Yet, his going to work for the Daltons was something big. Maybe Mr. Dalton was a millionaire. Maybe he had a daughter who was a hot kind of girl, maybe she spent lots of money, maybe she'd like to come to the south side and see sights some time. Or maybe she had a secret sweet heart and... (Native Son 36)

The use of hyperbolic scenes and phrases generate interest but also make the world he is creating bizarre. In fiction, a writer is at liberty to manipulate his plot as he pleases. But the degrees to which he handles it will determine the level of success or failure. Wright admits using weird scenes but he tries to justify them. In the introduction "How 'BIGGER' was Born", he says:

If a scene seemed improbable to me, I'd not tear it up, but ask myself 'Does it reveal enough of what I feel to say in spite of its unreality? If I felt that it did, it stood. If I felt that it did not, I ripped it out. The degree of morality in my writing depended upon the degree of felt life and truth I would put down upon the printed page. For example, there is a scene in Native Son where Bigger stands in a cell with a Negro preacher, Mr. Dalton, Mrs. Dalton, Bigger's mother, his brother, his sister, Al, Gus and Jack. While writing that scene, I knew that it was unlikely that so many people would ever be

allowed to come into a murderer's cell. But I wanted those people in that cell to elicit certain important emotional response from Bigger. And so the scene stood. (Native Son xxx-xxxI)

What Wright is saying here is that the message is more important than the form. In the same way, the defense of Max is somewhat absurd. Instead of pleading for the insanity of Bigger, he launches head long into a sociological monologue. And when Bigger opens up to Max after twenty-five years of distrust of all men, we could only grin. Wright's style at such instances tasks the reader's credulity so much. Donald Gibson commenting on why Wright joined the Communist Party says:

American democracy isolated him because he was a Negro: the Communist Party offered "the first sustained relationships-of my life". He was amazed and immensely gratified to learn "that there did exist in this world an organized search for truth of the lives of the oppressed and the isolated. He joined the search; he was a member of the revolution because he thought that the Negro experience could find "a home, a functioning value and a role in communism's radical position. (Five Black Writers 6)

The author was in search of truth which he thought the communist party possessed. Although he later left the party, he did find his voice:

"If you possessed enough courage to speak out what you are" Wright wrote, "you will find that you are not alone." He had enough courage and he spoke out and this courageous speaking out, it should be remarked, was the only literary creed-it was certainly no aesthetic theory-he ever went by. (Donald Gibson 6)

A careful reading of the novels *Native Son* and *Black Boy* by Richard Wright reveals that the trauma of racism has remained a permanent feature of the Negro life. The erosion of the humanity, courage and self respect of the black man has left the Negro a permanently devastated individual. In assessing this progressive assault on the Negro dignity, Hugh M. Gloster in his article "Race and the Negro writer", says:

The inhumanities of slavery, the restrictions of segregation, the frustrations of prejudice and injustice, the debasements of concubinage and bastardy, the ravages of persecution and lynching—these have constituted the bitter experience of American black folk; and it is only natural that the Negro writer has focused upon the themes of racial defense, protest, and glorification. (*Black Expression* 255)

The Negro trembles before the white man but attacks him behind. The universal lesson that can be drawn here is that once there are two cohabiting races and one towers and lords it over the other, brotherly love vanishes. If this love is in existence, Bigger Thomas could not have strangled Mary Dalton and burn her in an attempt to conceal the murder which obviously was an accident. Then, there is the effect of racism on the whites themselves. Racism led whites to see blacks as sub-human beings. They whites refuse to see them as equals and co-inhabitants of the environment. This then breeds in the whites a neurotic belief in their superiority. Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Black Orpheus*, summarizes the tragic effects of racism thus:

For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen; he was only a look—the light from his eyes drew each thing out of the shadow of its birth; the whiteness of his skin was another look, condensed

light. The white man-white because he was man, white like day light, white like truth, white like virtue- lighted up the creation like a torch and unveiled the secret white essence of things. Today, these black men are looking at us, and our gaze comes back to our own eyes; in their turn, black torches light up the world and our white heads are no more than Chinese lanterns swinging in the wind. (The Black American Writer 5)

This passage summarizes the vicissitudes of racism. Racism, bigotry and prejudice will only be minimized when men and women come to recognize that no solid foundation may be laid on the ruins of others, whether of the same skin colour as ourselves or not.

CHAPTER THREE

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE LABYRINTHS OF SEX AND MUSIC IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison, the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for literature, is one of the greatest African American writers living today. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio (a northern community located near Lake Erie) Toni Morrison is the second child of the four children of George Wofford and Ramah Willis Wofford. Her father found employment as a shipyard welder where the family had moved from south to the north to escape racism. Always well-dressed and doing three jobs at a time to support his family, George Wofford, developed intense hatred for the white people which rubbed on his daughter. But her mother was much of a church-goer who sang in the choir.

The parents of Toni Wofford taught her many songs and tales of southern black folklore. She had hoped to become a dancer like her favorite ballerina, Maria Tallchief, and she loved to read. In her first grade, she was the only black student in her class. At this time she was friendly with many of her white school mates but did not experience discrimination until she started dating. Morrison loved the works of Russian writers like Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, the French author Gustave Flaubert and English novelist, Jane Austin. Her zeal for education was excellent and in 1949 she graduated with honours from Lorain High School.

With the support of her parents, she proceeded to the prestigious Howard University in Washington DC and majored in English with a minor in Classics. She changed her middle name to Toni because people could not pronounce her first

name Chloe. It was in the course of touring the South with her repertory company that she saw for the first time the intense discrimination in the South where her parents had run away from. Thereafter she went for a Masters degree in Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she graduated in 1955. On graduation she took up a job at Texas Southern University in Houston to teach introductory English. In 1957, Howard offered her a job where she met her husband Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect, and they married in 1958.

During the civil rights era, she met Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Andrew Young and Dr. Martin Luther King. Her marriage was brief and unhappy although blessed with two sons. In 1958, Toni Morrison left her matrimonial home back to her father's house and their estrangement was complete. While editing the books of prominent black Americans as a staff of Random House, she began to write. The editorship of the prominent black Americans greatly sharpened her literary skill.

In 1970, her first novel, *The Bluest Eyes*, was published. The story is about an adolescent black girl who is desirous to have blue eyes and white beauty standards. The book was a commercial failure but it however launched Morrison into the literary world.

From 1971-1972, she was associate professor of English at State University of New York and in 1973 her second novel *Sula* was published. It was an improvement on the first outing for which it became an alternate selection book by the Book of the Month club. In 1975, *Sula* (1973) was nominated for the National Book Award in fiction. She was then a visiting lecturer at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

In 1977, *Song of Solomon*, her third novel was published. It was an instant success, winning Book Critic's Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the National Council. The themes of friendship between two black women in *Sula* (1973) and a male narrator's search for his identity are the preoccupations of Morrison in *Song of Solomon* (1977). There is noticeable improvement in craft and focus on the part of Morrison. *Tar Baby* (1981), her fourth novel was published. The book explores the themes of race, class and sex conflicts among white and black characters. The image of Morrison soared and on 30th March, 1981, her photograph was published on the cover of *Newsweek*.

State University of New York in Albany appointed Morrison the Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities in 1984. It was there that she wrote her first play, *Dreaming Emmett* based on the true life account of Emmett Till, the teenage black boy killed by racist whites in 1955 for whistling at a white woman. The play was first staged at the market place theatre in Albany on 4th January, 1986. Toni Morrison took another historical account with her next novel, *Beloved* published in 1987. The story is about Margaret Garner, a black slave who in 1851 escaped to Ohio with her children from her master in Kentucky. When she was about to be captured, she tried to kill her children rather than surrender them to another life of slavery. In the course of her action, only one of her children died for which she was jailed.

The publication of *Beloved* in 1987 engraved the name of Morrison in gold as it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988. Princeton University named her the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities, thus she became the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy

League University. While accepting the offer, she was said to have enthused: "I take teaching as seriously as I do my writing". In 1992, *Jazz* was published which was conceived as a planned trilogy with *Beloved*. Her work of criticism, *Playing In the Dark: Whiteness and the literary Imagination* was also published in 1992. *Beloved* was released as a movie on 9th October, 1992, starring Oprah Winfrey as Sethe and Danny Glover as Paul D.

In 1993, Toni Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, as the eight woman to do so and the first black woman to receive the prize. Susan Vega Gonzalez opines that Toni Morrison and Gabriel Garcia Marquez have many things in common. She argues that Morrison and Marquez, the Caribbean writer, "share not only thematic concerns but also diverse narrative techniques" (1)

Although Morrison admires Garcia Marquez's works, she has consistently denied imitating his fiction (see Watkins 50). *Song of Solomon* (1977) is the work of Morrison that is mostly compared with Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). For Morrison, *Song of Solomon* was the greatest work, the seminal book that led to the award of the Nobel Prize for literature. Morrison is largely involved in the reconstruction of the communal history of her people. For this she relies on the use of the memory, the reclamation of identity and history of her oppressed race.

JAZZ

The story of *Jazz* by Toni Morrison is an exploration of the challenging life of African Americans in the 1920s New York. It is also the history of the era when most African Americans moved north to escape the racial stifling conditions that enveloped them. It is a bold attempt by Morrison that aims at envisioning an epoch through the eye of a single family and

marriage of Joe and Violet Trace. In a sense, *Jazz* is also a love story, a tragedy in the realm of the absurd. Stories continue in every life and age, but this one is of a special kind, about sex run wild and placated as we experience the tragedy. It is hardly just to apply moral judgment when we fear insanity and this is what makes *Jazz* both grotesque and entertaining.

The greatness of Morrison in this novel lies in the use of the Jazz music at the background to X-ray the Harlem of 1920s. The craze of the period which is partly to escape racism and partly to seek greener pastures by African Americans leads Joe Trace and his wife Violet to join the bandwagon. Youthful and madly in love, they "train dance into the city". Like in Morrison's own marriage, the love between Joe and Violet hits the rock and Joe finds himself in the arms of Dorcas, his new love. Violet runs mad and when Dorcas begins to flirt with Acton, Joe kills her. Apart from closeness in age, Dorcas has a reason for dumping Joe. She says:

"Acton, now, he tells me when he doesn't like the way I fix my hair. Then I do it how he likes it. I never wear glasses when he is with me and I change my laugh for him to one he likes better. I think he does. I know he didn't like it before. And I play with my food now. Joe liked for me to eat it all up and want more. Acton gives me a quiet look when I ask for seconds. He worries about me that way. Joe never did. Joe didn't care what kind of woman I was. He should have. I cared. I wanted to have a personality and with Acton I'm getting there. I have a look now". (190)

Self actualization, definition and personality development are the main reasons why Dorcas shifts camp. Joe is death for her while Acton is life. It is hardly fair not to follow one's moral judgment at very critical situations.

Toni Morrison is the narrator in the story and she sums up the affair thus: "that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going". The author's ambivalence is understandable as it is part of her art to always involve the reader. Part of Morrison's greatness is her ability to create both difficult and impossible situations in her art. The personality trait of violet is a typical example. The sober Violet is ready to do violence to a dead woman because she was her husband's mistress. She tries even to steal a baby. These are contrariness that only a gifted writer can manage well.

Another area of Morrison's thrust is the sidelining of white centrality in black art. It is a curious definition that seeks to whittle down white overheating influence and remove them as both the yardstick and object of evaluation. In the epigraph of *Jazz* she states this eloquently when she says:

I am the name of the sound
And the sound of the name
I am the sign of the letter
And the designation of the division.

Epigraphs are signposts and reflections of how writers want their books to be read. Gerald Genette holds this view in thresholds of interpretation. For Beth A. McCoy and Jacqueline M. Jones:

..The students, contemplating both epigraph and its context helped them to look out for *Jazz's* dualities, dualities they might have earlier assumed to be impossible and mutually exclusive (how could the character "Violet", a fine, upstanding citizen, also be "Violent", a woman who tries to steal a bay?) (48)

Morrison's approach is a way of turning the heat on whites, a role reversal where the predator becomes the prey. Joe Trace brings this to the knowledge of Mr. Frank when he tells him that the only condition the white people use to assist blacks is to first pity them, "They had to pity a thing" (Jazz 125). In other words, blacks are the "thing". Jacqueline sees the whole package of western donor agencies as an ego trip, to establish a hierarchy and to create the sponsor-sponsored and subject-object relationship. Morrison articulates this in Joe Trace who makes the survival of the black man the subject and the object, finds how to extract survival from white people (Jones 69).

Morrison applies a sarcastic tone in describing the situation of blacks in the early 1920s America:

The money you earn for doing light work-standing in front of a door, carrying food on a tray, even cleaning strangers shoes-got you in a day more money than any of them had earned in one whole harvest. White people literally threw money at you-just being neighborly: opening a taxi door, picking up a package ... steel cars speed down the streets and if you saved up, they said, you could get you one and drive as long as there was road. (106)

By satirizing the era, in a controlled tone, Morrison knows such a feat is not achievable. But she wants the reader to see the elation of blacks at the time and their dream of freedom, freedom that is both elusive and constrained. It is a mood wrapped in jazz and alcohol, utopia and unattainable. By sexualizing Jazz, Morrison wants her African Americans to see the "glory" they had envisaged.

The setting of Jazz has a compelling force that binds and envelopes. Its hold on the people is progressive, strangulating

like in Edgong heath in Thomas Hardy's works. Morrison sees a relationship between Joe's weird lifestyle as a force he cannot control:

Take my word for it, he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That is the way the city spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say.....you can't get off the track a city lays for you. (120)

The alluring influence of the city is so much as Yeoman Kim observes: "Its music operates as a similar seducing mechanism. Dorcas, for example, lived "a city seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day. 'Come', it said, 'Come and do wrong' (67). The city people are directly exposed to the overwhelming temptation of crime and the carnal "appetite" of its seductive music". (127)

Part of a writer's greatness can be measured by his level of education, attention to details and the socio-political events that shape the world he is describing. He cannot run away from the politics of his day and the way he grapples with it will bring out the level of his craft. The writer's prejudice or biased historical accounts could twist his art if he is not guarded and knowledgeable. In an interview, Morrison says of it:

You had to stay alert to political changes, because you never know what people were going to do at any movement. So you had to be always on guard and be able to adjust quickly. That ability was a double entendre: at the same time accommodating the grid we felt and the determination not to let life beat us up completely you know, that instinct for survival plus "joine de vivre" was very important. ("Toni Morrison" 41)

It is perhaps for this reason that a writer's right to interpret his age is not challenged; but he must bear in mind that critics could hold him accountable when he errs. This then implies caution on his part, deep value judgment, commitment and critical evaluation of society.

The catalogue of socio-political, economic and cultural injustice dramatized in *Jazz* is inundating. When for instance Dorcas is shot by Joe Trace, the ambulance does not come "really because it was colored people calling" (210). Golden Gray behaves weirdly and displays racist sentiments because he is trapped between two racial worlds: his mother, Vera Louise Gray is a daughter of a rich white landlord while his father is "a black-skinned Nigger" (145).

Similarly, Wild is a victim of rape, race and gender and she is left to perish with her pregnancy. Is it any wonder then that she is wild, depraved and a regular friend of birds, isolated wild life and unloved? In the case of Violet, she loses Dear Rose early in life because her husband abandons the family and the inhuman sheriff takes everything including the seat she is sitting on. The mother of Dorcas dies in an inferno. Bearing in mind that there is a limit to endurance of outrage, the African Americans of the 1920s are therefore a generation that is pushed beyond limit and needs redemption. But the forces they have to contend with are myriad. Morrison's panacea is in the realm of catharsis as it is exemplified in the language of the narrator as she beams her light on Golden Gray:

Now I have to think this through, carefully, even through I may be doomed to another misunderstanding. I have to do it and not break down. Not hating him is not enough; liking, loving him is not useful. I have to alter things. I have to be a shadow who wishes him well, like the similes of the dead left

over from their lives. I want to dream a nice dream for him. Lie down next to him, a wrinkle in the sheet, and contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it, diminish it. I want to be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open. (161)

But the narrator's unreliability makes this passage objectionable. We have been used to hard, unfeeling and selfish Gray. The passage jars on our senses as she attests to in the previous page, "I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) how unreliable I am". (160)

A panoramic exploration of Morrison's art reveals a consistent pattern of fluidity, perhaps a deliberate attempt to go against convention. The order we have always known-exposition, narrative hook, climax, falling action and resolution, are usually not so in Morrison's novels. While she holds good plot outlines, but the order of beginning, middle and end do not usually conform. We might never know a climax but we could see her working out a resolution. It could have been suffocating not to see some soothing effects. We see it worked out in Joe after shooting Dorcas. Dorcas allows herself to bleed to death without making Joe pay the supreme price. Felice brings Joe's mind round again with the last words of Dorcas: "There's only one apple... just one. Tell Joe". (213) Felice as Dorcas's best friend makes it clear that she loved him. Through the soothing words from Violet, we are compelled to agree with Morrison that the contradiction is part of "the mystery of love". (5) The restorative transformation in Violet is summed up by Yeoman Kim in these words: "Violet's anxiety about life is gradually relieved through a series of conversations with the motherly woman, Alice. Reconciliation and sisterhood thus come to sprout between Violet and Alice, who otherwise might have had a lifelong feud due to Dorcas's death". (131)

Yet, Dorcas's statement as recounted by Felice is susceptible to varying interpretations. Stephen Knadier believes that the carrot Felice dangles before Joe that Dorcas loved him could mean the other way. As she argues:

Her statement to Joe, however, is one that we need to recognize is deliberately ambiguous and indeterminate. Felice tells Joe that Dorcas said, "There's only one applejust one. Tell Joe". (213) While we as readers are not told specifically how Joe interpreters this message, from his smile we assume that he takes these words as a sign of Dorcas' singular devotion that he is the only apple of her eye. But ... Felice's record of Dorcas's final message could as easily mean that there is only "one bad apple" (Joe), and thus her message was a whisper of hatred and unforgiveness. (114)

Still, the only apple could mean Acton and not Joe. The statement could be Dorcas's own confession that she cannot help her condition as there is only one true person in her life. The chain of interpretation is endless. But what is significant is Morrison's creative ability in extending and cloaking an otherwise straight- forward statement. Closely related to this is Morrison's new creation of a combative woman in the person of Violet. It is now time for the African woman to stand up to her situation. Alice Manfred calls Violet "Women with knives" (85). Violet takes up the gauntlet, to explain her new way of life to the good natured Alice Manfred:

"I wasn't born with a knife"

"No, but you picked one up"

"You never did?" Violet blew ripples into the tea.

"No, I never did. Even when my husband ran off I never did that. And you. You didn't even have a worthy enemy. Somebody worth killing. You picked up a knife to insult a dead girl". (85)

We could have recommended Violet for the asylum but for Morrison's earlier stance about the African American woman:

Black women were armed; black women were dangerous and the less money they had the deadlier the weapon they chose. Who were the unarmed ones? Those who found protection in church and the judging, angry God whose wrath in their behalf was too terrible to bear contemplation. (77)

To punish Joe, Violet takes a boyfriend and makes him visit her in the house but Joe does not pay them any notice. She even tries to break Dorcas's funeral ceremony and is chased away. Violet's weird attitude is brought to the January meeting of the Salem Women's Club but effort to help her is voted down as "only prayer-not money-could help her now" (4). She is left to figure out her own problems. Violet's weird attitude reaches a limit with:

One particular thing the aunt showed her, and eventually let Violet keep for a few weeks, was a picture of the first face. Not smiling, but alive at least and very bold. Violet had the nerve to put it on the fireplace mantel in her own parlor and both she and Joe looked at it in bewilderment. (6)

It is hardly possible that Morrison is recommending Violet as the prototype of the new African American woman. Apart from her silences which annoy her husband and her unpredictable attitude, which is public knowledge, some of her actions defy rational analysis. Before the funeral issue:

...Violet sat down in the middle of the street. She didn't stumble nor was she pushed: she just sat down. After a few minutes two men and a woman

came to her, but she couldn't make out why or what they said. Someone tried to give her water to drink, but she knocked it away. A policeman knelt in front of her and she rolled over on her side covering her eyes. He could have taken her in but for the assembling crowd murmuring "Aw, or she's tired. Let her rest" They carried her to the nearest steps. Slowly she came round, dusted off her clothes, and got to her appointment an hour late, which pleased the slow-moving whores, who never hurried anything but love. (17)

The passage raises fundamental questions:

Is Violet Trace finding it difficult to co-ordinate her activities? Why does she keep appointment with prostitutes? Why does she reject help when she most needs it? Why does she need to steal the Dumfrevy baby? Is she trying to make up for her own childlessness? For Morrison, Joe Trace is as childish and crazy as his wife, Violet. In assessing him, she says:

I imagine him as one of those men who stop somewhere around sixteen. Inside, so even though he wears button-up-the front sweaters and round-teed shoes, he's a kid, a stripling, and candy could still make him smile. He likes those peppermint things last the live-long day, and thinks everybody else does too. Makes me wonder about Joe. All those good things he gets from the Windermere, and he pays almost as much money for stale and sticky peppermint as he does for the room he rents to fuck in. (121)

For her therefore, Joe is no more than a pampered doll, hardly ever a man.

But Joe's childhood seems to explain it. He is raised by Rhoda and Frank Williams along with six of their own children. Joe is closer to her last child, Victory who is only three months old when Joe is taken in. Mrs. Rhoda Williams never pretends that Joe is one of her children. The boy gets this inkling even before he is three years old. When the boy asks of his parents, she tells him they disappeared without a trace. Joe gives Trace as his surname on his first enrolment in school. Victory is aghast:

"I don't know", I said.

"Cause Mama be mad. Pappy too"

Joe maintains his stand.

"No they won't"; I said. "Your mama aint my mama". "If she aint, who is?"

"Another woman. She be back. She coming back for me. My daddy too".

The love existing between Joe Trace and Victory Williams is like that between David and Jonathan in the Bible.

The discrimination against blacks could be found most in work areas and in hotels where blacks get tips because they have to be pitied. Except blacks are pitied they receive no good will: "... The secret of kindness from white people they had to pity a thing before they could like it." (125) The other area was in rent payment where blacks get meagre salaries and are everywhere hunted. They still have to pay higher tax which keeps on rising while those of their white counterparts stay the same: "When the rent got raised again, and the stores doubled the price of uptown beef and let the white folks meat stay the same, I got me a little sideline selling Cleopatra products in the neighborhood." (128)

Desperation in Joe Trace can be traced to two areas. His wife Violet alienates him by sleeping with a doll in her arms. So when he meets Dorcas, his emotion runs wild:

How did I know what an eighteen-year-old girl might instigate in a grown man whose wife is sleeping with a doll? Make me know a loneliness I never could imagine in a forest empty of people for fifteen miles, or a river bank with nothing but live bait for company. Convince me I never knew the sweet side of anything until I tasted her honey. They say snakes go blind for a while before they shed skin for the last time. (129)

So when Violet begins to fight Dorcas, we say it is partly her fault that her husband is unfaithful. Joe shoots Dorcas in desperation. He had once given her a dollar which was a whole day's pay when he was young. Having been disappointed in his cologne in a blue box and his flower, he sees an alternative desperation which can be seen in this soliloquy:

Dorcas, girl, your first time and mine I chose you. Nobody gave you to me. Nobody said that's the one for you. I picked you out. Wrong time, yep, and doing wrong by my wife. But the picking out, the choosing. Don't ever think I fell for you, or fell over you. I didn't fall in love, I rose in it. I saw you and made up my mind. My mind. (135)

Morrison uses the scene of the naked berry-black woman to stress on the futility of colour to evaluate human situation. She also plays on the nakedness of the woman and the horse and seems to say there is little difference in the world of divide. The bestial horse and the unconscious woman are not too far. But they provide different services and mean different things to both white and black:

When he picks up the reins, he cannot help noticing that his horse is also black, naked and shiny wet, and his feelings about the horse are of security and

affection. It occurs to him that there is something odd about that: the pride he takes in his horse, the nausea the woman provoked. He is a touch ashamed and decides to make sure it was a vision, that there is no naked black woman lying in the weed. (144)

The value whites place on black life can be seen in the passage described. The naked black woman is not better than a baggage. But his trunk is more valuable. The narrator sees it all:

After he has seen to the placement of the trunk, he goes back to the carriage to get the woman. The removal of the trunk has displaced the weight, and the carriage is tipping a little on its axis. He reaches in the door and pulls her out. Her skin is almost too hot to handleHe lays her down on a cot, and then curses himself for not having pulled its blanket back first. Now she is on top of it and the coat is all there seems to be to cover her. Its ruin may be permanent. (147)

For Morrison, there are two kinds of white people and she hides behind the narrator to profess them:

"He means Tuxedo and the train stops in Pennsylvania and Ohio and Indiana and Illinois".

'And all the kinds of white-people there are. Two kinds' he says.

"The ones that feel sorry for you and the ones that don't. And both amount to the same thing. Nowhere in between is respect. (204)

Jazz is the veil that covers the pain which Morrison tries to create. The racism, frustration and pain, the tensions of unrequited love and the zeal to get back at adversaries all have a compelling pull on the reader. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris says of it:

This play on the oral and written language mirrors the structure of the blues and the instrumental variations of jazz. The narrator seems to thrive on pain and on the lyrical laments of all voices telling tales of woe in the narrative, and its very form captures the unpredictability and riffs of jazz. The city blues tell the stories buried voices could or would not. (221)

SONG OF SOLOMON

Song of Solomon to a large extent is Morrison's own autobiography undisguised. Strouse Jean says: "The presence of the ancestor Solomon is based on the oral tradition of Morrison's family, her grand father being John Solomon Willis" (54). Morrison herself in an interview with Bessie Jones acknowledges this autobiographical trait. She admits she has relatives in Alabama (Jones 130). The story of *Song of Solomon* is a graphic character portrait of Macon Dead III whose family can be seen as symbolically dead. Although the Dead can be described as affluent, their determination to penetrate the rigid racist white America is frustrated by a system that does not see anything good in the Negro.

Economically, the Dead family is accepted by the whites but they are alienated by the black society of their extraction. Thus, the Dead family finds itself in a dilemma of both cross-cultural conflict and class crisis. These doldrums place the family in a most difficult position and stifles its value and identity reconstruction. The Dead is therefore not an ideal happy home as the cold spirit of its members, the relentless pursuit of rent and materialism, the virtual lack of co-operation of the family members give the impression that all is not well.

Macon Dead 111, the protagonist has little education. The name Dead is given to the grand father of Milkman by a drunken white officer during the reconstruction. For Susan Vega-Gonzalez: "This is one more example of the inadequacy of the history written in a hierarchical world where the oppressors write the history of the oppressed" (1). Song of Solomon is the story of Milkman Dead's search for his identity. His commitment to materialism, palpable linear approach to value and time are some of the enduring issues his father transferred to him. But his spiritual journey which is symbolized in his journey to his ancestral home will shake all that and lead to his rebirth.

The extreme individualism in the Macon's home is typical of the known individualism in Western value system. But this is unlike the communal and compassionate value system in a typical African American home. It is this attitude of rugged individualism that alienates the Dead's family from the mainstream of African American life.

Milkman who leaves his home in Michigan in search of gold in Virginia believes that the discovery will secure his material future but he ends up discovering his own identity. The search initially is both for escape and liberation but in his ancestor's world, he finds his flight a re-union with the communal will of his ancestors and the attendant mythical values. Milkman Dead finds that there is a relationship between his experience and that of others.

Between Pilate, Milkman's younger sister, there is a world of divide. Pilate is cast in supernatural level and in a sense more spiritual. She is born without a navel and her smooth stomach frightens male friends away from her. Pilate is a contrast to what her family symbolizes. She shuns status, money and

individualism which determine the bond between her brother and others. She latches herself to worthwhile spiritual values, despite her self-sufficiency to show that the self should fly above materialism.

Pilate's lofty ideals which can be seen in her sense of compassion and love are directly opposite to her brother's extreme sense of material love. The author tries to display the hollowness in the Dead's home through the portrayals of Sunday parades in the Park yard when she says:

"These rides that the family took on Sunday afternoons had become rituals and much too important for Macon to enjoy. For him, it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man. It was a less ambitious ritual for Ruth, but a way, nevertheless, for her to display her family". (31)

The illiteracy of Macon Dead is symbolic. It is the collective illiteracy of African Americans and their destiny in the mainstream American. It is an illiteracy that designs and determines their future and well-being. Macon names his daughter Pilate, not because he knows what it means but for the much his education can afford. And when the full implication is brought home to him, his mind is made up and he holds on rigidly to it in a misguided and chauvinistic way. His source is the Bible and his finger has reached on to it. This discourse is pertinent:

"That's where my finger went down at"

"Well, your brain aint got to follow it. You don't want to give this motherless child the name of the man that killed Jesus, do you?"

"I asked Jesus to save me and my wife"

"Careful, Macon"

"I asked him all night long"

"He gave you your baby"
"Yes. He did. Baby name Pilate"
"Jesus, have mercy".
"Where you going with that piece of paper?"
"It's going back where it came from. Right in the Devil's flames". (19)

Naming his daughter Pilate is Macon's way of getting even with Jesus, who could not save his wife from death despite all night supplication. His limitation could be seen in the manner he tackles his God and the result he expects from him. This atheistic self-righteous indignation will remain his guiding principle and the benchmark he uses to approach his business. When Mrs. Baines who lives in number three Fifteenth Street could not pay her rent, he is resolute:

"Your rent is four dollars a month, Mrs. Baines.
You two month behind already".

The insolvent woman pleads:

"I do know that, Mr. Dead, Sir but babies can't
make it with nothing to put in they stomach".
(2)

Macon makes the implication known immediately:

"Can they make it in the street, Mrs. Baines?
That's where they gonna be if you don't figure
out some way to get me my money". (21)

Macon then gives his ultimatum. His insistence though is good for business success but his society also plays a part in molding him. Mrs. Baines account to her grandchildren sums up the orientation of Macon: "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see. A terrible, terrible thing to see" (22)

Macon was so rich that in 1936, there were few black people who could live as much as he did. He could have been more helpful to other fellow African Americans if he so desired. Apart from Reverend Coles and Dr. Singleton, the Dead family stood out as the only coloured people who could own two houses at the period. Macon Dead reveled in his opulence while envy and jealousy trail his success. Morrison takes her time to describe his wealth, attitude and black impression of him. Morrison's grouse is perhaps at another level; it is Macon's insensitivity and his unwillingness to help lift other blacks from the lower rungs of the ladder. Morrison's description in this passage sums up her grouse:

He never went over twenty miles an hour, never gunned his engine, never stayed in first gear for a block or two to give pedestrians a thrill.

He never had a blown tire, never ran out of gas and needed twelve grinning raggie-tailed boys to help him push it up a hill or over a curb. No rope ever held the door of its frame, and no teenagers leaped on his running board for a lift down the street. He hailed no one and no one hailed him. There was never a sudden breaking and backing up to shout or laugh with a friend. (32)

Instead of being the hero of African Americans of his age for breaking the jinx, Macon Dead is not counted among one of the liberators. He is seen as the very arm that oppresses the blacks. In retaliation, Macon courts no good will and he receives none. His robust financial stance reeks like dung among a people that should have been hailing him.

Morrison takes racial theory to the level of absurdity. She feels that racists are not better than idiots. She shows the level discrimination has reached by establishing the level it has

descended to even in the toilet: "Aint but two toilets downtown they let colored in: May-Flower Restaurant and Sears. Sears was closer. Good thing nature wasn't in a hurry." (46)

Morrison establishes six kinds of black people, using colour as the basis for such categorization. As with whites, blacks can be codified and streamlined into different shades:

"There are five or six kinds of black. Some silly, some woolly, some just empty. Some like fingers. And it don't stay still. It moves and changes from one kind of black to another. Saying something is pitch black is like saying something is green. What kind of green? Green like my bottles? Green like a grasshopper? Green like a cucumber, lettuce, or green like the sky is just before it breaks loose to storm? Well, night black is the same way. May as well be a rainbow". (41)

Morrison's argument is that the problem of America can also be found with black people who could be silly, empty and without goal in life. Such people constitute both a menace to the authorities as well as their race. It is perhaps this critical balance that makes Morrison a great writer and acceptable to both whites and blacks. The hopeless future of black people can be summed up in the Guitar and Milkman's discussion:

"Let's get us some weed. That's one thing I can have". (62)
Recourse to drugs is the only way to mitigate the pain that everywhere envelopes black people. This comes as Feather refuses to serve them beer. Guitar compares sweet things with white people and dead people. He hates them with a passion. Just as sweets make him want to throw up, so do dead people and white people do to him. Milkman's frustration and contradiction are like the crises of black Americans of his own

generation. This could lead to incest. Milkman symbolizes this as Morrison aptly describes:

"Sleeping with Hagar had made him generous. Or so he thought wide-spirited. Or so he imagined. Wide-spirited and generous enough to defend his mother, whom he almost never thought about, and to deck his father, whom he both feared and loved".
(69)

Milkman feels as much pain and contradiction when his father is killed. The crisis of existence for blacks leads Dr Forster to deliver his own daughter. The unethical practice is odious to Milkman, Macon and Morrison. The author assesses him from the mouth of his son in-law. Macon's suspect's incest and he tells Milkman, his son that his father in-law was sleeping with his wife, his other daughters:

"In the bed", he said, and stopped for so long Milkman was not sure he was going to continue.

"In the bed. That's where she was when I opened the door. Lying next to him. Naked as a yard dog, kissing him, him dead and white and putty and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth". (73)

The passage sums up Macon's hatred of Dr Forster, his distrust of his daughters and the urge to kill his wife which eventually led to his hitting her and his son's retaliation. After Macon's revelations, Milkman begins his own incestuous feeling for his mother. He now sees her as an obscene woman without sexual control. The idea drives him further to the wine shop and his lust for liquor. The company of his gang isolates him from the crisis and psychological trauma at home. Morrison uses the crude language of black Americans to drive home the level of their education. When Till, the young Negro boy, stomped to death in Sunflower County, Mississippi case is mentioned: the

gang argues if it will ever be in the press. The position it will appear is contested:

"What the fuck is the difference", shouted Guitar.

"A kid is stomped and you staidin fussin about whether some cracker put it in the paper. He stomped, aint he? Dead, aint he? Cause he whistled at some scarlet O'Hara cunt"

Moral depravity at African American spots is well known. Milkman begins to sleep with Hagar, his cousin at twelve while she is seventeen. After so many years, he is tired of her especially as he begins to date girls of his own age. Reba's love is as fire driven as that of Hagar. She gives in everything and Pilate stabs her man friend when he strikes her:

"Now, I'm not going to kill you, honey. Don't you worry none. Just be still a minute, the heart's right here, but I'm not going to stick it in any deeper, it 'll go straight through your heart. So you have to be real still, you hear? You can't move an inch because I might loose control. It's just a little hole now, honey, no more in a pin scratch. You might loose about two table spoons of blood, but no more. And if you're real still, honey, I can get it back out without no mistake. But before I do that, I thought we'd have a little talk". (93-94)

Pilate is as weird in other ways. He gives Milkman's mother, Ruth, some love potion which attracts Macon back to her. It is this relationship that produces Milkman: "She gave me funny things to do. And some greenish-gray grassy-looking stuff to put in his food..... it worked. Macon came to me for four days. And two months later I was pregnant" (125).

But Pilate's nature is her undoing. She has no navel. Men avoid her like a plague (148). They prefer to sleep with women of all deformities but not one without a navel. The act constricts

Pilate and makes her hate men. Any man thus who offends her gets brutalized. Morrison is disturbed by the apathy of blacks. She hides under Guitar to put it across. It is a subtle wake-up call on blacks: "I suppose you know that white people kill black people from, time to time, and most folks shake their heads and say, 'Eh, eh, eh, aint that a shame". (154)

This will not do, Morrison seems to say. Should blacks continue to be the butt of white people? Milkman brings home the full implication of allowing the genocide to continue:

"...Any man, any woman, or any child is good for five to seven generations of heirs before they rebred out. So every death is the death of five to seven generations. You can't stop them from killing us, from trying to get rid of us. And each time they succeed; they get rid of five to seven generations. (15)

Morrison's stand is that white people are both unnatural and crazy. For indulging in murder and doing it for fun, it is only an act of a deranged being. She sees it as an organized crime against black people which when committed is always interpreted as the act of a drunk or crazy person. If the act is possible, why do blacks who are even ignorant not indulge in it? Morrison then submits through Milkman:

"And more to the point, how come Negroes, the craziest, most ignorant people in America, don't get that crazy and that ignorant? No. White people are unnatural. As a race they are unnatural. And it takes a strong effort of the will to overcome an unnatural enemy". (156)

Milkman is not very different from Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*. The symbol of flight, day dream that are characteristics of Bigger's generation are also prevalent

in Milkman's world. Morrison recreates that scene, "New people. New places. Command. That was what he wanted in his life" (180). Just as Bigger simulates military command, so Milkman dreams of a command position with Guitar. The law is as unjust to blacks as the agents that implement them. The police in America do selective searching of cars and will hang on cars owned by blacks. The author accuses American police of corruption. When they arrest blacks they could be left off the hook once they can pay: "They acted different when you took that sucker off in the corner and opened your Wallet". (204)

Morrison sees the circle of life of a black man as tragic. Both the white man and white woman want him dead. The only respite is that the white woman prefers him in bed but does not care if he lives or dies thereafter. His tragedy does not end there. He has no life-line in the black woman, who wants his full attention and is ever suspicious of him. In addition: "They won't even let you risk your own life, man, your own life-unless it is over them. You can't even die-unless it's about them. What good is a man's life if he can't even choose what to die for?" (223).

Justice to Morrison will come, no matter how long delayed. She believes in some form of divine intervention. Milkman will find this out in his flight that his grand father died in the hands of the Butlers. Reverend Cooper tells him God is never asleep:

"Where are they? The Butlers. They still live here?"

"Dead now. Everyone of 'em. The last one, the girl Elizabeth, died a couple of years back. Barren as a rock and just as old things work out, son. The ways of God are mysterious, but if you live it out, just live it out, you see that it always works out. Nothing they stole or killed for did 'em a bit good. Not one bit." (232)

The warning is as much for whites as it is for blacks. Morrison thus is for social justice and universal kinship. Her reprimand

runs like a red tape through the breath of the entire human race. Black and white may be separated but there is a form of common contract between Africans and their black brethren. There is a common opinion that the living and the dead are in communion. Respect for the dead should always be observed. Reverend Cooper tells Milkman: "Now, that's a thought worth having. The dead don't like it if they're not buried. They don't like it at all" (245). The grave for them both is not the end and they see, feel and crave for self respect.

Morrison takes a prophetic look at the reign of the white man and enthuses that it will come to an end. The Blackman will survive and watch it crumble. Just as the white man is callous and inhuman towards black people and their condition, so will blacks look on indifferently while white reign perishes. In a sense, Morrison is saying that racism is a cancer that eats up universal brotherhood. Circe tells Milkman that she is not attending to the properties of the Weimaraners as a sign of loyalty: "If the way I lived and the work I did was so hateful to her she killed herself to keep from having to do it, and you think I stay on here because I loved her, then you have about as much sense as a fart". (247)

The Weimaraners who represent all white people will turn up in role reversal to take the heat from black people. Morrison's recourse to divine justice is understandable. Racism and repression are double-edged swords: they cut their bearers too. Circe denunciation and vengeance represent black vengeance which Morrison subtly says will come. Circe the servant is rebellious even in her great inheritance of white properties. Circe says:

"They loved this place. Loved it. Brought pink veiled marble from across the sea for it and hired men in Italy to do the chandelier that I had to climb the

ladder and clean with white Muslim once every two months. They loved it. Stole for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and dogs. And I will never clean it again. Never. Nothing. Not a speck of dust, not a grain of dirt, will I move. Never. Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rotAnd I want to see it all go, make sure it does go, that nobody fixes it up. I brought the dogs in to make sure. They keep the strangers out too. (247)

Morrison through Circe is hinting on the stupidity of holding on to a passing world, to a world that is merely illusory and unpredictable. It portends danger to ever envision an all time grip on this nothingness. Morrison's slap on the face of humanity is across board, not only on the face of whites but that also on those of blacks who anticipate future take over. But Circe is stupid too; to think that her revenge will be eternal because she will one day die and so will the guard dogs. A stranger will then come, a stranger of any colour.

Milkman's search which terminates with meeting the place his grand father was murdered rakes up the ancestor Solomon in Morrison's life. Milkman's search is like that of Morrison. The author anchors the two pilgrimages on a personal note:

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky,
Solomon gone home (303)

Circe helped deliver Macon, Milkman's father and Pilate. Circe makes the ancestor story come real. Linking this up with Morrison's life can be achieved when we listen to her:

"The act of imagination bound up with memory.
You know, they strengthened out the Mississippi
River in places, to make room for houses and livable

acreage. Occasionally, the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that. Remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory-what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our flooding". (Morrison "Site" 119)

CHAPTER FOUR

NATIONAL SPACE, BORDER EMPLOTMENT AND CROSS-CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN J.M. COETZEE'S NOVELS

John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the leading writers writing in English. Born on 9th February, 1940, in South Africa, Coetzee is an academic and writer who is now living in South Australia as an Australian citizen. He is best known as a novelist, critic, translator and academic whose literary career reached its peak with his award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. His father was a lawyer and his mother, a school teacher. His grandfather Baltazer (or Baker) was a Polish immigrant to South Africa who came along with some Dutch settlers dating back to the 17th century.

The greater part of Coetzee's early life was spent in Cape Town and Worcester in Western Cape Province which he recounted very vividly in *Boyhood* (1997), his fictionalized autobiography. At Cape Town, he attended St Joseph's Catholic College in the suburb of Rondebosch. He studied Mathematics and English at the University of Cape Town where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1960 and Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics in 1961, both with honours. Soon after he moved over to London where he worked with the IBM Company as a Computer programmer. In 1963, he was awarded a Master of Arts degree from the University of Cape Town, which he fictionalized in his memoir. Coetzee has also received a PhD in Linguistics at the University of Texas at Austin. His dissertation was on Computer Stylistic analysis of the works of Samuel Beckett.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia reports that Coetzee taught English and Literature at the State University of New York at

Buffalo until 1971 when he sought permanent residence but was refused because of his involvement in anti-veteran war protests. Consequently, he returned to South Africa where he took up appointment as an English Literature Professor at his alma mater, University of Cape Town. He retired in 2002 and relocated to Adelaide, Australia, where he was made an honorary research fellow at the English Department of the University of Adelaide. His partner, Dorothy Driver is also a fellow academic at the same University. J.M Coetzee has also served as a Professor on the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago until 2003. Apart from his novels, he has published critical works and translations from Dutch and Afrikaans.

On 6th March, 2006, Coetzee became an Australian citizen. As a writer, J.M. Coetzee's reputation stands firm in the world body of letters. In his private life however, he is a recluse and a man who detests publicity with a passion. He is so much eager to avoid public attention that he did not collect his two Booker Prizes in person.

He married in 1963 and the marriage was blessed with two children, a boy and a girl. But the union was an unhappy one. In 1980, the couple divorced. At the age of 23, his son was killed in an accident, an event he fictionalizes in his *The Master of Petersburg* (1994).

As a personality, Coetzee is a man of ascetic life, a monk of some sorts. He neither drinks nor smokes and meat is way out of his life. He spends at least an hour each day of the week writing and he cycles long distances to keep fit. Coetzee has attended several parties where he was said not to have uttered a word. He is thus a man of little words but he is deeply interested in the course of humanity. For instance, he took

active part in the establishment of Oak Tree Press's First Chapter series where literary giants sign works to raise money for the child victims of HIV/AIDS.

Coetzee has won the following awards:

- (1) Waiting for the Barbarians – Taones Tait Black Memorial prize in 1980.
- (2) 3 times winner of the CNA Prize
- (3) Age of Iron; The Sunday Express Book of the year award
- (4) The Master of Petersburg – won the following awards - the Irish Times International fiction prize in 1995, the French Femina Prize, the Faber Memorial Award, the Commonwealth literary Award and in 1987, the Jerusalem Prize for Literature on the freedom of the individual in society.
- (5) The Life and Times of Michael K (1983) – the Booker Prize. He was the first writer to win it twice (1983) for Life and Times of Michael K and in 1999 for Disgrace. The second writer was another Australian, Peter Carey.
- (6) On 2nd October, 2003, Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The press release of the award cited his “Well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue, and analytical brilliance” while focusing on the moral inclination of his works.
- (7) He was awarded the Order of Mapungubore by the South African Government on 27th September, 2005 for his “exceptional contribution in the field of literature and for putting South Africa on the world stage”.

HIS WORKS

As a writer, the training of Coetzee has a lot of influence on him. His two degree in English and Mathematics coerce him

into the form his art takes. Julian Gitzen says that: "Each of his works, to date, is dominated by a single consciousness, and his characters are distinguished by a punctilious exactitude of expression" (1).. Although a recluse and a man who shuns publicity, Coetzee has always wanted to enter the world stage, to shirk himself of all tags of localization. He made this clear in an interview he granted to Tony Morphet in *Tri Quarterly* when he asked why it should be his fate to be consistently labeled a "South African novelist".

Juliet Gitzen believes the tag South African novelist re-echoes because

"He was born in Cape Town and that to date at least half of his fiction is set in South Africa. Also his work often treats race relations and the conflicts that arise when territorial or cultural boundaries are crossed. Coetzee may be forgiven some exasperation, however, because the themes of his novels are universal rather than provincial; and his fictional characters might, and indeed do, dwell in a multitude of locales. Repeatedly his novels focus upon the processes by which history is made and recorded, emphasizing how history is registered in human consciousness through the medium of language (1)

Coetzee does not believe that literature can save mankind but can help in promoting noble ideals. His great imaginative talent and his consistency of purpose mark him out as a writer the world cannot ignore. Michael S. Kochin says of his works:

- Coetzee has in his fiction critically explored the notion that literature as we know it can promote human ideals. His work constitutes a radical challenge to our learned prejudice that Western high culture can help twenty-first century men and women find a human life together. Coetzee

criticizes Western high culture from within: His essays reveal him as a penetrating critic of great figures of modernist fiction such as Robert Musil (1).

As a personality, Coetzee cuts the figure of a man who devotes all his energies to his art, even if it would give him a misunderstanding label. But his works are indeed in a class of their own which his nature bellies. Simon Willis in evaluating Coetzee and his critics says this among others:

J.M. Coetzee cuts a surprisingly clashing figure in person. Speaking last week at the University of East Anglia, as part of UEA'S new writing season, Coetzee took to the stage with a loose walk, even a subtle swagger, in a perfectly pressed suit.

He spoke on censorship, and then gave readings from two of his early novels, *In The Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). His delivery was nuanced and witty, albeit with a sense of private restraint. At one point in the evening, I even saw him laugh (1).

His opinion on varied nature of his work has been taken up by his critics whom he always suspects. He gives a clear signal that he doubts their mission and that he has no intention of cutting a close intimacy. He says of them: "I cannot find in myself to align myself with the censor-the dark suited, bald-headed figure, with his pursed lips and his red pen' (1). When he talks about the censor, his reactions are laced by investigative words and red lined suspicion. He thinks that the censor friend is: "like being intimate with someone who does not love you'(1). In a cynical tone, he calls them "guardians of the Republic of Letter - - - book reviewers". Simon Willis believes Coetzee over- reacts to criticism.

It worries some critics like H. van der Menve Scholz, a professor at the University of Cape Town where Coetzee once taught, and Anna M. Louw, also a novelist in the city of Australia where Coetzee also resides; whom Coetzee subtly refers to. Since the reports of the critics are positive, Willis then wonders where Coetzee builds his grouse. Willis opines:

So how did it feel for a writer who once said that he considered it, a badge of honour to have a book banned in South Africa' to find out that the state's literary representatives – his unloving readers – were actually on his side? How are we to interpret the disclaim and sarcasm that spiked Coetzee's voice as he quoted those lines? (2)

Willis' submission is that Coetzee is not given to taking criticism kindly and when he gets one, his reaction may be over-stretched.

On racism in South Africa, Coetzee holds all whites accountable for the injustice blacks suffered for those years. He finds himself in a difficult situation when he explains the complicity of all whites:

Passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa. Afrikaners the whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or as a self defining group distinguished themselves in the commission of that crime. Thereby they lent their names to it. It will be a long time before they have the moral authority to withdraw that brand mark -- is it in my power to withdraw from the gang? I think not --- more important, is it my heart's desire to be counted apart? Not really. Furthermore – and this is an after thought – I would regard it as morally questionable to write something like the second part of *Duskland* – a fiction, note – from a position that is not historically complicity (Attwell Doubling 342-343)

On the resignation from social caste a writer belongs in South Africa, or indeed any part of the world, he makes it clear that it is an impossible attempt to accomplish. Although he himself has tried to use white women to show that the burden of life could tilt, by making them to be victims of the black male and even compliant to emerging black power, he sees it as his own attempt towards a symbolic resignation from a caste he was born into. This conflict of identify, crisis of class and the position of a writer are central to Coetzee's art. At a more personal level, he takes it as almost divine truth when he says:

The masters, in South Africa, form a closed hereditary caste. Every one born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but short of actually shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually doing it. (Attwell Doubling 96)

In agreeing with the above, Fiona Probyn stretches the imagination in a critical study of three of Coetzee's novels: *In the Heart of the Country* (1979), *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990). Probyn concludes that Coetzee does prove a symbolic resignation by using the white women in those novels to reverse a stereotyped white male dominance in conventional South African Literature. Probyn sees it as finished writing as Coetzee himself agrees. She believes that Coetzee "speaks of himself rather than for himself. In evaluating the works of Coetzee from the finished perspective, Probyn argues:

Coetzee sees himself 'without authority' because the type of authority associated with his position as a white male in South Africa is one whose authoritarian connotations he rejects and,

throughout his novels, attempts to dismantle. He does not see himself as an author who commands words (the 'specter' is 'blind', nor necessarily as an author who has spanned considerable critical interest in the area of postcolonial, postmodern and South Africa Literature); Coetzee is a writer who is conscious of the ways in which writing itself is inextricably bound up with power. Coetzee represents his marginality, his "writing without authority", in the characters of his white women narrators who construct "their" texts (Oristory' Probyn 2)

Coetzee's *White Writing* deserves a critical study because it serves as a compass to navigate his works. In his *Magnus opus*, Coetzee takes a close study of the failure of the pastoral, conventional novel in South Africa and he beams his light on a future attempt to subvert it, which might lead to an emergence of the 'triumphant' baby. He says of it:

"Our ears today are finely attuned to modes of silence --Our craft is all in reading the other gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled; the dark, the buried, the feminine; alter ties --it is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn"(81)

Coetzee's preference for feminine instead of feminism is clear. Probyn believes that feminized version offers a better option, which precludes rivalry and the attendant implication for the state, truth and realism. Coetzee's feminized version sounds ambiguous which is a castration of master symbol that the white authority represents. Coetzee makes it clearer when he says: "there are many authoritarian societies on earth, but

Afrikanerdom strikes one as a society in which castration is allotted a particularly blatant role". (Attwell Doubling 374). Thus, Coetzee tries to feminize the enemy, the Afrikaner power, the white dominance and their overwhelming role.

Coetzee is not likely to win much converts in feminists who see his attempt as a valorization of weakness, who see feminism as a long drawn battle, an attempt to torpedo phallocentricism and replace it with their own brand of order, a 'little phallus' or becoming a man.

Although Coetzee's work is not cashing in on the dissension in feminist world, his position has been sufficiently made ambivalent and this has helped protect him from vituperous feminist inquiry.

One important conclusion which many reach after reading the novels of Coetzee is that they possess the characteristics of allegories or parables. Coetzee himself admits that because of the condition posed by state censorship, critics usually brand such literature as allegorical. The stigmatization is a plus for Coetzee who is seen as having traversed conventions, banality and the elementary stages that destroy the good purpose and status of some works of art. Agreeing with this, Clive Barnett says further that: 'In reviews, Coetzee is positioned both as part of a tradition of committed anti-apartheid writing, but also as a writer whose work succeeds in escaping the conventions of political fiction and thus elevating itself to the status of art'. (291)

In the same breathe, J. Kramer believes that Coetzee is a more accomplished writer than Andre' Brink because while the former takes his time, weighing the full import of words, in skilled meticulous fashion, the latter glosses or 'writes fast'(25)

Coetzee is seen as a first rate craftsman and his work is imbued with 'artistic purpose'. It is the same yardstick that is used to judge the work of Nadine Gordimer, *My Son's Story*. When compared with Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, Gordimer's art is considered weighed down because of her ever obtruding political commitment. Thus, G. Annan in his review rates Gordimer's *My Son's Story* low when he says: "it is a good read and good journalism. It informs and explains. But it's too banal and too explicit to be good art" (8-10). This is a kind of scathing critical comment never made on the works of Coetzee. Except of course when Coetzee begins experimentation by re-writing Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as *Foe* and Dostoevsky's *The Devils in the Master of Petersburg* does he meet with stiff criticism. D.J. Enright says it is "a static and anemic affair, despite the elegance of the writing" (18-20). For Z. Zinik, *The Master of Petersburg* is a mere 'literary pastiche' (19) of the novel of Dostoevsky.

Looking at critics' opinion and Coetzee's literary approach and style of writing, he is often compared with writers like Kafka, Conrad and Nabokov. It might not be too difficult to identify the age in South Africa in which Coetzee writes about. One can also figure out a consistent desire to represent all shades of opinion and diverse locations, characters that are capable of being found in any society. When he writes about oppression, he portrays it as phasal, time bound and even doomed. It is this kind of artistic mission that conveys the impression that his novels are anti apartheid prone and post apartheid narratives.

In all, J.M. Coetzee is the author of twelve novels: *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990) *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Disgrace* (1999), *Elizabeth Costell*

(2003), *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). He has also written two non-fiction: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, autobiography, *Provincial Life* 11 (2002). His other non-fiction include *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters from South Africa* (1988), *Doubling the Point: Essays and Censorship* (1996), *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays, 1986 – 1999* (2002) and *Inner Working*. He has also done some translations and introductions to books: *Landscape with Flowers: Poetry from the Netherlands* by J.M. Coetzee (2004), *Introduction to Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (Oxford World Classics), *Introduction to Brighton Rock* by Graham Green (Penguin Classics) and *Introduction to Dangling Man* by Saul Bellow (Penguin Classics).

LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL K.

It is Coetzee's fourth novel and included in the cast which B. Parry describes as "Powerful moral critique of apartheid" (19). For Irving Howe's review, the novel is about the theme of South African writer hemmed-in, in the apartheid enclave:

A great commanding subject hunts the South African imagination; yet this subject can also turn into a kind of tyranny, close, oppressive, even destructive. Imagine what it must be like to live as a serious writer in South Africa; an endless clamour of news about racial injustice, the feeling that one's life is mortgaged to a society gone rotten with hatred, an indignation that fear that one's anger may overwhelm and destroy one's fiction. And except for silence or emigration, there can be no relief. (35-36)

The story of Michael K. is one of progressive suffering of a character who is not identified with any race. The reader is led to believe that he is a black who is manipulated by the great and unyielding South African oppressive system. D.J. Enright

sees his travails as "passive suffering" (1037). What makes the life of Michael K. objectionable is the unheroic nature of his portrayal. Coetzee's creation fails to represent the black South African people under apartheid. Gordimer says the novel evokes a: "revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions" (3-4). She thinks Coetzee deliberately refuses to prop up an active black presence in South Africa and that a political solution is the answer to the crisis in the region under apartheid. D.A.N. Jones takes up Coetzee for not reflecting the true spirit of blacks in that society as of the time: "surely he does not represent the spirit of Africa? I see no point in this prolonged tale of woe" (17-18).

A white South African writer like Coetzee is caught between expectations of the majority black population and the endorsement of international audience. His use of allegories tend to push him into universalisation but some critics like Shrimpton think: 'Coetzee's urge to allegorize intrudes upon his narrative gifts' (43) Cynthia Ozick in her review of *The Life and Times of Michael K.* sees the attempt by the Doctor to read through the compact posture of Michael as an unnecessarily self-indulgent mission and a watering down of the "authentic inner dialogue"(1) She says that: 'the doctor's commentary is superfluous; he thickens the clear tongue of the novel by naming it's "message" and thumping out ironies' (28). By seeing the doctor's intervention as redundant, Ozick's opinion paints the impression that Coetzee did not look at that flaw after creating the character. But Michael K. is real enough, dynamic enough to fight the great power that confronts him; although not towering enough, and clearly not in the region of great characters.

Coetzee's characterization of Michael K. is in line with his approach in most of his novels. He does not come out to

criticize his characters gravely and this is characteristic of most of his novels. This creates the impression of passive commitment to moral and politic issues which unsettle his critics. This much can be said of *Disgrace*, his ninth novel. For Clive Barnett:

This difficulty in pinning down the political perspective of Coetzee's novels is in no small part a deliberate effect. Political and ethical ambivalence is a theme of all of his fiction. Coetzee steadfastly refuses to provide authoritative interpretations of his novels or to reduce them to political statements. In interviews, he cultivates a careful resistance to the standard gestures of the writer's political responsibility. In his critical essays he has explicitly marked his distance from instrumentalist conceptions of writing, and from understandings of the subordinate relation of fiction to history which have shaped the realist esthetics of mainstream oppositional South African Literature. (297)

Coetzee kick-starts the crisis in South Africa by showing the stages of violence which go on progressively. Michael K. is for three years without a job after leaving Parks and Gardens, a division of the Municipal Services of the city of Cape Town as Gardener grade 3 (b). His preoccupation then is to look at his hands and lying on his bed. He takes up a job as a night attendant at the public lavatories on Green Market Square. But trouble for him is not yet over.

On his way home from work one Friday he was set upon in a subway by two men who beat him, took his watch, his money and his shoes, and left him lying stunned with a slash across his arm, a dislocated thumb and two broken ribs. After this incident he quit night work and returned to Parks and Gardens, where he rose slowly in the service to become Gardener grade 1 (4)

His mother's unusual summon makes him run to her rescue and there bigger woes await him. He moves from this crisis to trying to support his mother, a task that takes almost a life time. His mother's swelling legs and arms, the callousness of the nurses and the sight of victims of violence all combine to unnerve him. His mother's tears make the burden difficult to bear, and when he asks for a wheel chair to assist her to the bus stop he is turned down. Trying to keep his job and take care of his mother are difficult tasks:

One evening the buses from sea point did not run at all and he had to spend the night in her room sleeping on the mat with his coat on. In the middle of the night he woke chilled to the bone. Unable to sleep, to leave because of the curfew, he sat shivering on the chair till daylight while his mother groaned and snored (7).

The life of Anna K, Michael K's mother, is anything but happiness. Born in a farm in the district of Prince Albert, her father, a habitual drunk, had no steady job and her mother whom she helped with her laundry job also worked in some kitchens, from where they moved to Odudtshoon where Anna got a little education. She went through marriages but only Michael K. is left with her. Poverty assails her everywhere and when it is raining, she pushes an old towel against "the door to keep water from seeping in. The room smelled of Dettol and talcum powder". I feel like a toad under a stone living here' she whispered. "I can't wait till August".

The lot of Michael K and his mother would have improved if the former has a discerning eye and any vision in him. He accepts all her mother's plan without question, including relocation to the countryside without enquiries on how they will survive. It is perhaps this aspect of his character that the critics of Coetzee find uneasy about this uninspiring hero:

She expected Michael to ask how she could believe that a small country town would take to its bosom two strangers, one of them an old woman in bad health. She had even prepared an answer. But not an instant did Michael doubt her. Just as he had believed through all the years in Huis Norenius that his mother had left him there for a reason which, if at first dark, would in the end become clear, so now he accepted without question the wisdom of her plan for them (9)

Some of Michael K's action could be interpreted as plain stupid. Every one he encounters sees this limpid aspect of his character. Little wonder then that when his mother finally dies, the hospital authorities cremate her without his consent and Michael K does nothing.

K and his mother's condition are not alleviated because of the apartheid laws of South Africa. To leave the Cape peninsula, they need both a police permit and to book a reservation for at least two months in advance. The booking clerk even tells him not to mention his mother's ill health as it does not constitute special grounds. The interminable wait turns Michael K into a vagrant and he begins to wonder the streets.

The intermittent outbreak of violence and shooting make the situation most intolerable. Looting of houses and shops makes security agents more aggressive. The insecurity and economic blockage of South Africa have increased the level of hunger and sporadic looting of shops is everywhere a common feature in that country. Even women are not left out in the ugly incident and those that loot and fail to run fast are shot dead by security agents. Hoodlums and the destitute roam the central district begging or stealing and when it begins to rain, they take refuge at corridors of public buildings.

Anna K. maintains her respect for the Buhrmanns. She has worked for: 'such nice people!' (14) as she calls them. When their house is battered, she says: "I don't know how they are going to get over it' (14). She is worried how the mess will be cleaned. But K's concern is about the welfare of his mother, not for the old people's sake. For this, while on the way to the country side, he annexes the old people bathroom:

'Just for a night or two; he pleaded with his mother, 'so that you can have a chance to sleep by yourself. Till we know what we are going to do. I'll move a divan into the bathroom. In the morning I'll put everything back. I promise they will never know' (15).

K's insensitivity reaches a heroic crescendo when he shows his mother a picture of a gleaning flank of roast port garnished with cherries and pineapple rings and set off with a bowl of raspberries and cream and a gooseberry tart: 'People don't eat like that any more; his mother said'. He disagreed. 'The pigs don't know there is a war on. Food keeps growing. Someone has to eat it' (16). By calling whites' pineapples and pigs, he is obviously echoing the disdain of other blacks over their style of living in a country ravaged by hunger and violence, a case where some are living in penury while others revel in opulence.

When K. makes bold to ask for a permit that is never to come, the rude policewoman makes him see he is a Kaffir. They will not give him a permit to travel even if his mother is dying until he has a reservation. He is given another form to fill: 'Already applied for the permit!' (19) When K tells her it is for the eighteenth of August, a month away and his mother's condition is getting worse, the policewoman tells him the permit will be sent to his address when ready. K. counters and:

The policewoman slapped the counter to still him. 'Don't waste my time. I am telling you for the last time, if the permit is granted the permit will come! Don't you see all these people waiting? Don't you understand? Are you an idiot? Next'. She braced herself against the counter and glared pointedly over K's shoulder: 'Yes, you. Next!' (20)

Although K does not bulge, he is still powerless before the force the policewoman is representing. K. takes his fate in his own hands like very many blacks who eventually paid the ultimate prize. At the check point, the policeman wants to enforce the law. A motorcyclist explains to him what is obtainable within the iron curtain:

'You can't travel outside the peninsula without a permit. Go to the check point and shown them your permit and your papers. And listen to me: you want to stop on the expressway; you pull fifty meters off the road. That's the regulation: fifty meters either side. Anything nearer, you can get shot, no warning, no question asked. Understand?' (22)

This is a police state. The police corporal makes it very clear to him: 'Have you got a permit, Yes or No?' demanded the corporal in command. 'I don't care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven't got a permit you can't leave the area, finished'. (23)

This situation cannot be managed and K. wheels back but not to safety. They are constantly attacked by thieves. Yet their suffering does not close Mrs. Anna K.'s generosity. For instance, she gives each of the three children on their way to church a coin, including the one that holds her hand.

The number of personnel in the South African hospitals is not enough. The result is that those few on duty work themselves lame. One of them complains as K. mounts pressure:

'When I come off duty I am so tired I can't eat. I just fall asleep with my shoes on. I am just one person. Not two, not three-one. Do you understand that, or is it too difficult to understand? K. looked away. 'Sorry', he mumbled, not knowing what else to say, and returned to the yard. (28)

K. is an unfeeling and hard cut young man. When his mother dies, he accepts her cremated ashes without tears. He does not miss her. His concern is how to survive, how to eat. His capacity to endure pain is beyond compare. He could live in holes, tree trunks and can eat almost anything:

He slept at the roadside and woke wet with dew. Before him the road wound upward into the mist. Birds flitted from bush to bush, their chirping muffled. He carried the suitcase on a stick over his shoulder. He had not eaten for two days; however, there seemed no limit to his endurance. (K 35)

The problems of the people are often compounded by security agents. The soldiers take over personal belongings and frighten the victims with guns:

'What do you think the war is for', said the soldier, parodying the movements of K's mouth. 'Thief. Watch it. You could be lying in the bush with flies all over you. Don't you tell me about war'. He pointed his gun at the box of ashes. 'Show me', he said. (37)

He only lets K. go after giving him a tip from his own mother's purse 'Tip', he said, ".Buy yourself an ice-cream". (38)

Yet there is a limit to K's endurance. After his capture and detention at the labour camp, K musters courage to confront the task master, the overseer:

'Why have I got to work here?' K said. His head swam; the words seemed to echo from far away. The overseer shrugged. 'Just do what you are told', he said. He raised his stick and prodded K in the chest. K picked up his shovel. (42)

From here he becomes a scavenger with no faith, no will of his own and no belief. He roams and lives off the land, eating anything that comes his way. But to the grandson of the Visagie, a white, K is not ready to serve:

The grandson, stripped to the waist and sweating, came to meet him.

'Very good', he said. 'Can you clean them quickly?' I would appreciate that. K held up the four birds, their feet together in a tangle of claws. There was a pearl of blood at the beak of one of the sparrows. 'So small you don't taste it as it goes down', he said. 'You wouldn't get yourself dirty, not even your little fingers'. 'What the hell does that mean?' said the Visagie grandson. 'What the fuck do you mean? If you want to say something, say it. Put those things down, I'll take care of them!' So K laid the four birds down on the stoep at the front door and departed. (63).

Not only this, K refuses to go to Prince Albert for the Visagie grandson and when he does, it is to bolt with his list and forty rand notes.

Coetzee has been criticized for the unheroic actions of K and it is not without reasons. K in the novel has demonstrated enough weak power and lack of vision to support this charge. For instance, he wanders aimlessly as the author observes:

He did not know what was going to happen. The story of his life had never been an interesting one'; there had usually been someone to tell him what to do next; now there was no one, and the best thing seemed to be to wait. (K 67)

This kind of characterization in a serious political situation is too academic to satisfy yearning political zeal. In many ways, K's life is most unsatisfactory as his life causes bewilderment instead of pity or love. To use K to represent the teeming black population in South Africa with K's already displaying uninspiring character is clearly a political obituary and Coetzee takes serious bashing as a result.

K does not have women friends. His inclination is not towards their friendship. Organized living is beyond him. Even in the resettlement camps where there are teeming women and children, he still keeps to himself. At the camp he is incapable of understanding the complacent psychology of the inmates:

Jakkalsdrift is your place of abode now. Welcome. You leave your place of abode, they pick you up, you are a vagrant. No place of abode. First time, Jakkalsdrift, second time, Brandvlei. You want to go to Brandvlei, penal servitude, hard labour, brickfields, guards with whips?, -- where do you want to go anyway?' He dropped his voice. 'You want to go to the mountain?' (K 78)

The grouse of the inmates is on the type of wage they receive. It is hardly enough to feed the family for a job that is very arduous. Sometimes blacks conspire so that they will not die of exhaustion. Robert advises Michael:

Before you break your back, my friend', he said 'remember what they pay you. You get standard wage, one rand a day. I get one rand fifty because I

have dependants. So don't kill yourself. Go and take a pee. You've been in hospital, you are not well. (K 81)

When the money is paid, the shop owners at Prince Albert extort it from blacks by hiking the prices of goods. The practice is also to discourage blacks from buying because they breed disease, are unhygienic and lack morals. They only need black cheap labour at Jakkalsdrif and not the menace they cause. The pastor preaches submission and resignation: 'Let peace enter our hearts again, O Lord, and grant it to us to return to our homes cherishing bitterness against no man, resolved to live together the fellowship in Thy name, obeying thy commandments' (83).

For K, he attends this service not out of religious zeal or communion spirit but to fill a vacuum in his life. Then he slips off Jakkalsdrif and wanders about aimlessly:

He strolled down the Jakkalsdrif-river till the wire and the huts and the pump were out of sight. Then he lay down in the warm grey sand with his beret over his face and fell asleep. He woke sweating. He lifted the beret and squinted into the sun. Striking all the colours of the rainbow from his eyelashes, it filled the sky. I am like an ant that does not know where its hole is, he thought. He dug his hands into the sand and let it pour through his fingers over and over again (k 83).

His life is redoubled meaninglessness. Yet despite his lack of hope, K is still humane and generous. He gives half his pay to Robert and carries the rest half in his pocket. Robert himself wonders about K's ever tendency to want to sleep:

'I have never seen anyone as asleep as you', he says. 'I'm sick, I can't work'; K tells the guard. 'Suit yourself but you won't be paid', the guard says. (84)

K prepares to take his destiny in his own hands by leaving the camp:

'I don't need to eat all the time. When I need to eat, I'll work' (85)

His philosophy amuses the guard. K dares the guard on what he will do if he seeks his liberty without his permission:

'And if I climb the fence? What will you do if I climb the fence?'

'You climb the fence and I'll shoot twice, so don't try' (85).

The language of the white farmer offends K:

'Where were you brought up, monkey?' shouted the farmer. 'Cut low, cut clean'. He took the sickle from K's hand, pushed him aside, gathered the next tuft of Lucerne, and cut it clean and low.

'See?' he shouted. K nodded.

'Then do it, man, do it', he shouted. K bent and sawed the next tuft off close to the earth. (87)

The situation at the resettlement camp at Jakkalsdrift is excruciating. Since they are under suspension, they must be made to understand they are neither wanted nor trusted. When security agents raid camps, they turn them into chaos, with dogs and heavily armed operatives to beat those who could pose a threat. Even radios are confiscated to prevent black communities from reaching the outside world. The camp guards are not left out since to harass them is to empower them to do the same to blacks:

'What are we keeping here in our backyard' he shouted. 'A nest of criminals and saboteurs and idlers! And you! The two of you! You eat and sleep and get fat and from one day to the next you don't know where the people are, you are supposed to be guarding! What do you think you are doing here, running a holiday camp? It is a work camp, man! It's a camp to teach lazy people to work! Work! And if they don't work we close the camp! We close it down and chase these vagrants away! Get out and don't come back! You've had your chance. (91)

The position of the South African white authorities can clearly be seen from the language of the blood officer who is commanding the raid of the camp.

In the camp, what the authorities want for blacks can be seen in the kind of commendation which the farmer gives to K. The whites do not want blacks to move beyond menial jobs:

Once the farmer took K. aside, gave him a cigarette, and commended him. 'You have a feel for wire', he said. 'You should go into fencing. There will always be a need for good fencers in this country, no matter what. If you carry stock, you need fences: it's as simple as that'. (95)

The people the fences should protect are whites. It is also to protect whites from the increasing violence. If K remains a fencer, the whites need him. J.M. Coetzee plays on the parasite symbol which the police captain talks about. The novelist challenges the South African government on the role and usefulness of the camp resettlement. Who is the parasite, the people or the government who uses the camps to extort forced labour? Who is actually the host and who is the parasite, he asks?

What if the host were far out numbered by the parasites, the parasites of idleness and the other secret parasites in the army and the police force and the schools and factories and offices, the parasites of the heart? Could the parasites then still be called parasites? Parasites too had flesh and substance; parasites too could be preyed upon. Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest. (116)

The minority whites cannot call the black majority parasites because they are preying on the choicest part of the black lands, their economy and political system. They have turned the host people into beggars when they are the prey and parasite. It is a very logical symbolism and Coetzee has earned a political mark. His allegorical approach though subtly rendered is a major gash on the apartheid policy of South Africa:

'I live in the veld' (120),

K replies to a question about the address of his abode:

'I live nowhere' (120).

The police men do not believe him as they do not believe most blacks:

'Spread out!' one of them shouted. 'I want the whole area searched! We are looking for footpaths, we are looking for holes and tunnels, we are looking for any kind of storage site.' (121)

When the police feed k, it is for him to get enough strength so as to help them track down other dissident blacks:

'Ask him again', said the officer, turning away.

'Keep asking him. Ask him when his friends are

coming. Ask him when they were last here. See if he's got a tongue. See if he is such an idiot as he looks. (122)

Coetzee through K makes a prophetic statement about what lies in store for the apartheid regime. It will come to an end:

Every grain of this earth will be washed clean by the rain, he told himself, and dried by the sun and scotched by the wind, before the seasons turn again. There will be not a grain left bearing my marks, just as my mother has now, after her season in the earth, been washed clean, blown about, and drawn up into the leaves of grass. (124).

K is like Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* when it comes to flying. But unlike Bigger who is a bully K is harmless:

'The music made me restless', he said. 'I used to fidget; I couldn't think my own thoughts'. 'And what were the thoughts you wanted to think?' He said, 'I used to think about flying. I always wanted to fly. I used to stretch out my arms and think I was flying over the fences and between the houses. I flew low over people's heads, but they couldn't see me. When they switched on the music I became too restless to do it, to fly. (133)

The police want to hold Michael K responsible for the terrorist attacks on vital installations. All these he knows nothing about. They have changed his name to Michaels and despite all his pleas he is still branded a terrorist. Both Noel and the doctor are poles apart on what to do with him: 'I am not in the war', he tells them (138). The doctor tries to argue with Noel to frame a report as no reasonable one can be extracted from K, but that is recrimination of an innocent man. In a way, K is

made to suffer for the collective terrorist attacks on the apartheid regime. The doctor makes a case for him:

He is a simpleton, and not even an interesting simpleton. He is a poor helpless soul who has been permitted to wonder out on to the battlefield of life, if I may use that word, the battlefield of life, when he should have been shut away in an institution with high walls, stuffing cushions or watering the flower-beds. Listen to one, Noel; I have a serious request to make. Let him go. Don't try beating a story out of him (141)

Obviously the interrogators want to use K to reach the terrorists whom they believe he has links with. But as it is, they want to hold him for a collective act committed. The doctor sums up K's life thus:

No papers, no money, no family, no friends, no sense of who you are. The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy. (142)

Then he makes out what one may call the soul of apartheid:

The laws are made of iron, Michaels, I hope you are learning that. No matter how thin you make yourself, they will not relax. There is no home made for the universal souls, except perhaps in Antarctica or on the high seas. (151)

Coetzee wants his readers to see that not all agents of apartheid are inhuman. He makes it very clear in Major Noel. He is more of a representative. Deep down he is a different person. At sixty, he is thinking of resigning, particularly as his widowed daughter wants him to come and live with her at Gordon's Bay. He makes a realistic statement about a regime that is running against the current and the official in its employ: 'You need an

iron man to run an iron camp. I am not that kind of man I could not disagree. Not being iron is his greatest virtue'. (154)

Coetzee wants the world to see that insensitivity is not the best option as the doctor has observed. The Major tells the doctor why apartheid is in place: 'We are fighting this war', Noel said, 'so that minorities will have a say in their destinies'. (157)

In book three, Coetzee takes the reader through what life will be after apartheid, how people of all races will live and feel for each other. It is a time to share, when K asks for water:

The man shook his head. 'Wine we have got, milk we have got, two kinds of milk' –casually he indicated the woman with the baby – 'but water, no, my friend. I regret there is no water in this place. Tomorrow, I promise. Tomorrow will be a new day. Tomorrow you will have everything you need to make a new man of you'. (175)

In the beach, Coetzee uses the inter-racial sex to show what life will be after apartheid. It will be true jollity.

DISGRACE

Recent evaluation of J.M. Coetzee's works reveal political commitment which his critics have denied in his works. Some believe that *Disgrace*, his ninth novel even fuel racial sentiment which obviously may not be the intention of the author. As a work of art, *Disgrace* is out to address the post apartheid era, a world where whites are no longer in control. The protagonist, David Lurie is anything but a shining example. At the age of 52, he is already divorced twice and demoted from the rank of professor of modern languages to adjunct professor of communications where he teaches one poetry course a year at Cape Technical University, South Africa.

Since he is incapable of keeping a woman at home, he finds his sexual satisfactions in prostitutes. The key prostitute he uses later rejects him and David could not find satisfaction in subsequent girls sent by the "hostels service". Then David Lurie runs into Melanie Isaacs, a young girl in his class and he logs in, "mildly smitten" as he says. The affair is brief and temperate but brings trouble to David as well. Melanie's boyfriend takes David head-on and Melanie in an attempt to sever her relationship, reports the matter to the authorities. Her father is called in. Before the disciplinary committee, David admits he is answering the call of Eros, but he is unrepentant despite all efforts to save him and he has no choice but to resign.

David heads for his daughter's holdings where she is gang raped by three black men, and David is unable to prevent it. He tries all he can to pull her out of the farm but Lucy does not bulge. Lucy is lonely after losing her lover, Helen and needs the company and protection of her black neighbours. David falls again into adultery with Bev, Lucy's friend and an animal manager. Peggy Lindsey in reviewing the novel comments:

By chronicling the consequences of one man's abuses of and fall from power, Coetzee creates a story of both universal and regional significance. On the one hand, David is a certain type who contemptuous of others, uses his position to take what he wants and to justify the taking. But David's story is also local - - - he is a white South African male in a world where such men no longer hold the power they once did. He's forced to rethink his entire world at an age when he believes he's too old to change and, in fact, should have a right not to. (2).

Coetzee from the onset makes his point that the situation is not the same as the story of the Life and Times of K. The position has changed for whites. They are no longer the ones giving violence; they are at the receiving end. David articulates it well after his resignation:

'Have just traveled up from Cape Town. There are times when I feel anxious about my daughter all alone here. It is very isolated. 'Yes', says Petrus. 'It is dangerous'. He pauses. 'Every thing is dangerous today. But here it is all right, I think'. And he gives another smile. (64).

Petrus does not give his white listeners the impression that he is completely sure. And when Lucy is gang-raped; including one of Petrus' brothers in-law, both Lucy and her father still cannot trust him. On the day she is raped, he does not report for duty as usual, a situation that is very suspicious. Yet Lucy does not press charges and she even agrees to keep the baby, a product of the rape to the discomfiture of her father. David Lurie tries to rouse his daughter to the true realities and to reject her complacent posture:

'Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?' (112)
'You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again'. (133)

Lurie's problem is that he still lives in a decaying edifice, the past which apartheid represents. His feeling of racial superiority and inability to read the handwriting on the wall are the real reasons why he continues to plunge into greater disgrace. Coetzee's chronology of his misdeeds is worthy of note, he: