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## Depiction of Muslim Women in **Samina Ali's** *Madras on Rainy Days*

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*"Samina Ali has created a compelling story filled with psychological insight and a deep understanding of the conflicts that plague all of us who inhabit two worlds."*

- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

*Madras on Rainy Days* is a sad, touching and pathetic story of the life of its heroine, Layla, who is a half-Indian and half-American. She lived partly in America and partly in India. Her parents don't want her to be inhabited by America and wanted her to retain her Indianness. Sameer also calls her:

".....Twins, like you"..... "Yes, like you. You, the American, you, the Indian. Same face, two people. So where is your home? (Madras: 117)

At the age of nineteen, her mother arranged her marriage to an engineer living in Hyderabad. When she was in America she had slept with her friend- Nate and got pregnant. Though so, she did not oppose the marriage arranged by her mother. She took pills to abort the baby and hence she was bleeding. When her mother comes to know about it, she takes her to *Alim* instead of the doctor.

The novelist throws light on the dresses and the *burkhas* of women which was according to their economic status or their family background. When Layla entered the house of *Alim*, she met his wife who "wore a faded sari, its torn edge wrapped around her head as a scarf, the end tight between her teeth." She also met the other three women who came there to solve their problems who wore "the old -style burkhas with mesh face coverings cast back to reveal their features, and not the more fashionable Iranian chadars that Amme and I did, so I guessed they were poor." As Layla said they did not look directly to the *alim* because it was considered improper, according to Islam, for men and women to look into each others' eyes, if they were not married.

The women were always considered inferior to men. It was that the women were made to serve their men and men to trouble the women. As stated earlier in the novel, Amme had a divorce from her husband, and lived there destructing her own life only for the sake of her daughter. Then Layla's father married Sabana, she also had the same status at home. She used to feed him at her own even in her pregnancy. Women were trapped in *burkhas* without considering their age.

"This was a Muslim neighborhood, where women did not leave the house unveiled, not even girls as young as six, their bodies yet indistinguishable from boys'." (Madras: 58)

Henna is the other woman character referred in the novel. Her husband went to Saudi where he couldn't take her with him, she had to live as a servant to her in-laws. He could come back to her only after completion of two years when he could enjoy a holiday for a month only. Even the private property given to her by her father was taken away to sell, breaking the rule of Islam. So it was hard life for her. She says to Layla;

"Everyone in the Old City knows. Wherever I go, women have questions or advice. They blame me or they pity me. It's become so hard, I don't want to leave the house." (Madras: 61)

It is only thrice the changing condition of women is referred in the novel. Layla's father told Henna about the change intending to suggest the second marriage.

"..... Customs are changing, Henna. These outsiders come in, they stir things up, they make things possible." (Madras: 65)

Secondly, after Layla's marriage, Zeba, her mother-in-law told her that only the wife has the power to rouse her husband. Thirdly when Layla went to the pizza place with her husband, she saw girls who were more free and frank than in America.

When she went to her in-laws, she was sent to her husband's room. While discussion, she came to know that all the letters sent to her by Nate were reached to her husband through the dress drawer. When he slipped his tongue in her, he omitted because of bleeding. So the union did not take place. Then he said to her that he is haunted by those letters and when he was touching her, he saw Nate touching her. He accuses her of making him a fool. He says:

"Yes, a fool. While I was writing to you, telling you how much I wanted to touch you, be with you, you were there----- with him. Letting him into your room, letting him..... *fuck* you...I tried to do what he... I didn't know I would feel so repelled!" (Madras: 94-95)

As she has no love for her husband, she doesn't care what happens and reacted very differently. She is very firm when she says:

"Do you want me to leave? If you want to.... Send me away, just call Nafiza-" (Madras: 95)

Then Sameer assures her that he will forget all that has happened in past and tells her not to ask about his past. Days passed, but Sameer couldn't make love to her. She was very eager to consummate the marriage, but he was unable. Both husband and wife go to Madras for honeymoon, but there also he could not make love to her. She then comes to know that he loves Naveed, his friend of the same sex. So she goes back to her home in Hyderabad and tells her uncle that she doesn't want to go back to her in-laws as her husband is unable to love her. But she is again sent to her husband's house where she is locked inside the room so that she may not run away. She again and again asks her in-laws that she wants to go back as it is a sin to sleep with such person, but her father-in-law insist her to take Sameer with her to America so that no one will know nothing about him. This is how a woman has no place in her home. She is used for others' sake only without thinking about her life. She had to marry Sameer without having a feeling of love for him only for the satisfaction of others. To whom she had loved, she could not marry because of the tradition. Moreover, she accepted

Sameer whole-heartedly as a husband but she, herself, was unfortunate enough to have such a husband who confessed once to her.

“This is ... I cannot tell you how much I needed to make love to you today, for me. Bloody hell, for me! You should not feel ashamed, you should not feel there is anything....lacking in you. There is something severely lacking in me, or so I am beginning to think.” (Madras: 95)

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Giroux, 2004

## Modernity in Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*

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Modernity is one of the important nativistic literary values of nativism. It is a process of change, evolution, progress and development. It is based on rationality, a progressive thought and aims at achieving a decent standard of living for all people. As a culture specific phase of history of any society or nation, modernity scrutinizes the traditional thoughts, values or institutions and fights against superstition, narrow world-view, and backwardness of society and other evilsome aspects of socio-cultural values. Its purpose is to bring about change in socio-cultural-economic and other fields. Mahatma Gandhi, a true nativist, prefers Indian modernity and its real strength is in native values. It is not blind imitation, adoption or borrowing things from the west. In this regard Choudhary, Indranath remarks, "The elements of modernity are to be sought in our roots and traditions – in our own realities...." (1997:2-3). On the whole, modernity cannot be and should not be transplanted but it must be shaped according to past traditions and present circumstances which suits to our ancient heritage. Thus it is a genuine course of social change which lies at the core of nativism.

Girish Karnad's second play 'Tughlaq' (1962) is originally written in Kannada and later translated into English by the dramatist himself for non-Kannada speakers. This play presents Tughlaq as a modernizing monarch and visionary idealist of medieval age whose mind was full of innovative ideas, ideals, plans and projects. Infact he wants to use them for the betterment and development of his subjects. He desires to make his state an utopia. So he sacrifices his sleep, personal enjoyment and luxurious games of life for this noble cause. Verily, he is much ahead of his age. Therefore, he is misunderstood by his people and age. While presenting reformative and progressive zeal of Tughlaq, Karnad wants to discover our identity and socio-cultural and moral meaning in the present scenario for setting up a new society. Thus this play becomes a political critique of the post-Independence decades.

Tughlaq is an avant-garde Muslim ruler of the fourteenth century India. He has uncommon desire to achieve noble ideals like peace, prosperity, justice, equality and harmony in his state. So he decides to implement certain policies for this. He takes five revolutionary decisions, viz. 1) prayers five times a day and punishment if one fails to do so, 2) the provision to raise voice freely

even against His Majesty, 3) the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, 4) circulation of copper coins alongwith the silver dinars, 5) liquidating all those coming in the path of his decision (Barche, G.D.:1999:74).

Tughlaq knows that there is a divine power in prayer which controls human mind and provides a great strength in a critical situation. So he makes Namaz or prayer compulsory and allows people to read Koran in the streets. He makes a law that the punishment is given if one fails to do so. This is new step which was absent in previous Muslim rulers. Infact prayer is a moral foundation of politics and Tughlaq wants to spiritualize it like Gandhi. However he makes prayer compulsory for the moral and spiritual betterment of his subjects.

Abolition of the obnoxious system 'Jizia-tax' from the shoulders of Hindus is a shocking decision of Tughlaq. He destroys it on humanitarian ground and treats Hindu-Muslim subjects equally for the communal harmony. Infact Jizia-tax is imposed on infidels by the previous Sultans which actually dates from the last quarter of ninth century. "It was tax paid by an unbeliever in an Islamic state for the permission to live. It means substitute money, that is, the price of indulgence" (Sarkar, Jadunath:1972:176). Tughlaq is widely read man. His vision is enlarged by Greek literature and principles of Zarathustra or Buddha which stresses on the importance on good conduct. He knows this evil tradition discriminates human being from human being. "The greatest truth that Karnad has brought out through his Tughlaq is that religious saints cannot wash away fifth from society" (Mahale, H.S.:1985:137). So Tughlaq exempts Hindus from Jizia-tax. He says, "Hindus are also human beings" (Karnad, Girish:1975(2001):2). Thus he ignores Shariat or canon law and proves himself a devotee of modernity.

Tughlaq has a passion to teach and to impart new things to his subjects. He desires to cultivate a true vision of justice and brotherhood without any discrimination. So he makes a provision to complain even against His Majesty if there is any injustice. Under this new system of justice, Vishnu Prasad files suit against Sultan that his land has been confiscated unlawfully by the officers of state. Kazi-i-Mumalik considers the matter carefully and declares that Brahmin's claim is right and he should be given five hundred silver dinars as compensation. Tughlaq admits his guilt and decision of Kazi-i-Mumalik. He proves 'everybody was equal in the eyes of law and it was proved by the act of Vishnu Prasad case. It was a rare act on the part of Sultan' (Mahale, H.S.:1985:113). No doubt, Tughlaq shows impartiality while administering justice. It reflects through the example when he orders a sentence of death by stoning to his own step-mother who found guilty in Najib's murder. Such novelty is seen once in a blue moon.

Shifting capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is another radical decision of Tughlaq. To observe communal harmony, secularism, to build new future for India and security from outside



invadation, are the main objectives of Tughlaq behind this decision. He says, “My Empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near to border and as you well know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom” (Karnad, Girish:1975(2001):3-4). This remark of Tughlaq displays his well-intentioned ideal view, noble vision for the creation of the ideal empire and acute observation of future without emotional attachment with the present. No doubt, all his ideals are influenced by Al Mutazi’s philosophy and Sadi’s poetry. On the whole, his decision of shifting capital suggests his inordinate ambition to change the course of history in general and to reshape and reconstruct it in particular like Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus.

Introduction of copper currency is another fine example of Tughlaq’s exordinary vision. It is the most daring experiment. This Monetary Policy shows his an innate passion to build ‘a new future for India’ (P.40). He introduces it alongwith silver dinars and giving same value both of them. He issues orders that in all transactions copper tokens should be accepted like gold and silver coins. Infact, his purpose is to build a passionate relationship between ruler and the ruled. Unfortunately his romantic journey of innovative idealism fails miserably. But one cannot deny his love for progressive move and unflagging zeal for reforms. On the whole, his novel Monetary Experiment shows his concrete ability and competence to do something new for the people and the state.

Tughlaq is a distinguished scholar and man of ideas. His vision is enlarged and shaped by Sukrat (Socrates), Aflatoon (Plato), Zarathustra or Buddha and Greek literature. So he segregates religion from politics and does not allow himself to rely on God, religion or prayer merely, though the word of God was his breath of life. The supreme ideals like peace, truth, justice, equality, prosperity and regeneration of people are invaluable than religion and religious people for him. Naturally he does not allow the religious leaders like Sheikh-Imam-Ud-din, Sheikh Haidar Ali, Sheikh Hood etc. to interfere into politics and to spread unlawful and fallacious doctrines of religion in society. When they try to do so, Tughlaq either imprisons or exiles or kills them strategically. He firmly says to Sheikh-Imam-Ud-din, “You propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha ..... I’m sorry. But it can’t be done.” (Karnad, Girish:1975: 2001:21). However, Tughlaq knows the spirit of religion which aims at the transformation of human heart, self-realization and social regeneration. Thus he tries to teach wisdom and truth, to mend the minds, to enlighten people’s souls and to free their minds from the

shackles of false religion. While doing so, he crosses the principles of religion but not defies nor sacrileges the religion.

It brief, Tughlaq is avant-garde Muslim ruler who takes radical decisions and implements certain policies in order to transform his state into utopia. His novel policies viz. Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of Jizia-tax, shifting capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, introduction of copper currency, equality before law, freedom of expression, impartial justice and segregation of politics from religion represents him a disciple of modernity whose visions are influenced by the ideology of secularism of Buddha.

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## **The Metaphor of the Family as Mileu for Social Comment – A Study of Edward Albee’s *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream***

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Once when asked if the American family or murdering parents and children constituted the recurring theme in his plays, Albee protested against the critical tendency to fossilize a living artist: “People are often eager to make neat packages. But I think one of the most preposterous things in the world is to examine a body of work that is growing and come to conclusions about it. If I were to drop dead I could understand an evaluation being made. This whole thing may be merely a preparation for something entirely different.”<sup>1</sup>

In the early plays, Albee satirizes the bourgeois American family and destroys the common illusions attached to it. He ridicules the family’s standardized components but nevertheless implies the possibility of mutual accommodation which emerges in the later plays. The important difference between the early satires and the middle and later plays is that the family unit and the house which shelters it come to represent in both real and metaphysical terms an acceptable search for order and a place for the inherent human need for love. The family is a common metaphor through out, first, providing the agency for either disharmony or communion among individuals, and, second, embodying a recognizable entity for that peculiar Albee character which Ruby Colm has called “Albeegory”.

The family group as a vehicle for the themes of spiritual and actual death-in-life is obvious in his brief, early play, The Sandbox. This brief skit, only fourteen minutes long, presents a caricature of Mommy and Daddy in their cliché-ridden existence, opposed by the life-death cycle represented in the dying Grandma and the Young Man, Angel of Death. In abstracting the characters from The American Dream for a play commissioned for the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Albee has successfully distilled their essential qualities and clarified antagonisms. Mommy-Daddy (and their hired musician) are clearly on one

side and the Grandma -- Young Man on the other. On the Mommy-Daddy level, Albee continues his thematic exposure of the hypocrisies and empty customs developed; the awareness of love alongside the inevitability of death. In addition to the basic antagonism between the two sets of characters there is a complex system of role-playing on each side. In The Sandbox, Albee adopts a Pirandellian technique whereby the characters knowingly play out their individual roles within a social structure and a known destiny. The movement of the play<sup>2</sup> is towards inevitable natural death in contrast with the deadening pretenses of living.

Mommy and Daddy come on to a bare stage as a beach setting, where once more we have the isolated two chairs, "set side by side, facing the audience". The stage directions inform us that when these two people call each other by name," these names are empty of affection and point up the presenility and vacuity of their characters.\* Onstage is a Young Man performing calisthenics, employing the arms only, suggesting "the beating and fluttering of wings. THE YOUNG MAN is, after all, the Angel of Death" (9).<sup>3</sup> He is the American Dream Young Man further advanced into simplicity of mind and heart, an actor who is told by others what to do.<sup>4</sup>

The Mommy chooses a place as a perfect spot to set Grandma down for her approaching death – "There is sand there – and the water beyond" (9), she says, describing the end of the land as bordering on eternity. They bring on Grandma, carrying her in a kind of foetal position, and "dump her" into a sandbox. In this box, she is child and ancient, embodying the entire process of life's cyclical ritual, with the end in the beginning. Mommy has arranged a competing ritual of burial according to social custom – the proper thing to do in the face of her mother's death. Playing the role of stage director setting the scene for death, she commands a hired musician to play, sees that all is in readiness, with Grandma in her symbolic box, and seats herself along with Daddy to await the event with suitable attitude of mourning.

They are interrupted in their grief by Grandma who sometimes acts a child and sometimes a stage manager, stepping out of the dramatic frame. She halts the expected passing of time, informs them that she is not yet ready to die and turns to the audience to launch into an autobiographical account of her life: her marriage to a farmer, his Death,

\*Edward Albee. Two Plays—The Sandbox, The Death of Bessie Smith (New York: Signet Books, 1963) p. 8. All subsequent references are to this edition.

and the resultant situation where, pointing to Mommy, “I had to raise that big cow over there by my lonesome,” (The Old Woman in Albee’s play Box-Mao-Box was also married to a farmer, also reviews her past, is also rejected by her girl children, affirming the continuity of Albee’s familial characters throughout his work). Grandma finally begins to busy herself, while the Young Man Angel who is an actor speaks the lines he has been taught and Grandma complements him for his performance. In this ambience of surrealism and Pirandello – like role-playing, Grandma, the master of her own death, folds her arms and pretends to expire at her own rate in the sandbox; Mommy, thinking that Grandma is dead, stops the musician, ceases the death-watch and mouths a cliché of satisfaction with the ritual she has directed: “It pays to do things well”. She and Daddy leave, satisfied that they have done the proper thing. Ironically, Grandma is not dead - she has observed her daughter’s sentiments and mocks them comically. Weak and unable to get out of the box, she is really near death and in her last moments establishes a real exchange of affection with the youth as Angel of Death.

Brief as it is, The Sandbox deserves close scrutiny, despite the fact that the critic George Wellwarth states that, like The Death of Bessie Smith, it is not worth much comment.<sup>5</sup> In a comprehensive view of Albee’s work, it represents a refinement of the beginning plays in the succinctness of its characterizations and in sparseness of its design, a foreshadowing of what is to come in the immensely more sophisticated Box and Quotations. Role-playing which has been fully developed in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and to some extent in Tiny Alice and A Delicate Balance – is among the devices initiated in this little play.

Synthesis of time is one of the most important techniques characteristic of Albee in the development of plot and theme. In The Sandbox, that synthesis is exemplified in the character of Grandma who literally bridges past and present. The end of the playlet is in the beginning, as the aged Grandma dies in the coffin dust of the child’s sandbox. Age and childhood, past and present, the worldly and the other worldly are together – a situation which Albee’s later plays explore in greater depth.

The box is a symbol unique to Albee, appearing repetitively throughout his work. In The Sandbox, as the child’s place and the ultimate enclosure of the old lady, it is the container of time’s continuity, exemplifying the existence of the past and the present. We have a first inkling of this notion in The American Dream with Grandma’s boxes as the

securely tied-up emblems of a lifetime. The form of the box becomes ultimately dominant in Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung where it represents an inevitable presence, a known order which remains unaltered and unalterable through past and present time. Related to the box is the room which can be seen as a symbolic place of security in The Zoo Story. The room as enclosure becomes in later plays a vital centre of struggle, uniting past and present time.

Despite its germinal characteristics in respect to Albee's later work, the little skit is, after all, fundamentally a farce. It is a comedy of manners, employing some rather sophisticated devices including parody, reversal, and irony, as well as amusing visual effects. Contrasted to the stillness of death and the visual blankness of the scene is the Bergsonian comic device of characters engaged in mechanical repetitive motions: the Mommy - directed musician keeps playing the perfunctory music of the funeral rites, while nodding up and down like robot; the Angel of Death, playing his role, does his fluttering calisthenics hovering over the dying Grandma. The nodding may also be interpreted as a friendly and affectionate recognition of the Young Man by the Musician, but the contrasts are visually amusing while at the same time they are symbolically representative of two opposing attitudes at the moment of death.

In one of his fatuous attempts to rewrite Albee, Michael Rutenberg decries all this motion onstage as detracting from Grandma, and wishes it had been omitted.<sup>6</sup> Rather than detracting, these movements enhance the comedic comment in the play, providing a visual and aural counterpoint between the measures of the funeral music and the dance of death as well as juxtaposing two movements in time, one related to the sterile life of Mommy and Daddy and the other to the Grandma - Young Man alliance of feeling. They also provide some rhythm to an otherwise statistically-designed playlet.

Comic scenes in The Sandbox demonstrate Albee's exceptional ear for the orchestration of dialogue and sound. The following dialogue demonstrates his handling of the rhythm of speech with a kind of sparseness resembling vaudeville:

(There is an off-stage rumble)

**Daddy:** (Starting): What was that?

**Mommy:** (beginning to weep) It was nothing.

**Daddy:** It was . . . it was . . . thunder . . . or a wave breaking . . . or something.

**Mommy:** (Whispering through her tears) It was an off-stage rumble . . . and you know what that means . . .

**Daddy:** I forget . . .

**Mommy:** (Barely able to talk) It means the time has come for poor Grandma . . .  
and I can't bear it!

**Daddy:** (Vacantly) I . . . I suppose you're got to be brave.

**Grandma:** (Mocking) That's right, kid, be brave, you'll bear up, you'll get over it.  
(Another off-stage rumble . . . louder).

**Mommy:** Ohhhhhhhhhh . . . poor Grandma . . . poor Grandma . . .

**Grandma:** (To Mommy) I'm fine! I'm all right! It hasn't happened yet! (16-17).

Bigsby correctly observes that The Sandbox is the "closest that Albee has ever come to reproducing an "absurd" play in the European sense. Nevertheless there are clear indications that his personal vision stops short of Beckett's nihilism. For in the person of Grandma he creates a character whose vitality and perception contrast directly with the vacuity of those who take part in her personal endgame. She clearly has no patience with the hypocrisy shown by Mommy and Daddy. She recognizes their clichés for what they are and in doing so surely attests the existence of other values. At the same time, she faces her death with a dignity and even a sense of touching irony which seem to lift her above the immediate absurdity of her situation."<sup>7</sup>

Despite obvious resemblances to Pirandello, to Strindberg in The Dance of Death and Ghost Sonata, and to other contemporary playwrights, Albee has his own private outlook and technique for developing it. This little play, concentrating on the familial absurdities alongside the vision of love and the need for love, reveals a non-destructive attitude, a typically American hope that things ought to be better than they are. Through the medium of farce, Albee has sharpened his characteristic view.

The American Dream may be considered as play which enlarges the scope of Albee's satire on American society. The American family emerges from its background role in The Zoo Story and becomes the object of open derision in The American Dream; but while Albee ridicules the moral, social, and economic standards which govern the institutions of the home and marriage, he is concerned with corruption in the whole of the societal structure. From the technical point of view, this play contains devices which become characteristic of the later Albee; it also demonstrates clearly a growing schism between his presentation of social problem and an exhibition of personal suffering.

In the Preface to The American Dream, dated May 24, 1961, Albee writes:

The play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of the artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.



Is the play offensive? I certainly hope so, it was my intention to offend – as well as amuse and entertain. Is it nihilist, immoral, defeatist? Well to that let me answer that The American Dream is a picture of our time – as I see it, of course. Every honest work is a personal, private yowl, a statement of one individual's pleasure or pain, but I hope that The American Dream is something more than that. I hope that it transcends the personal and the private, and has something to do with the anguish of us all.<sup>8</sup>

Albee hopes that the examination of the “American scene” transcends the “private yowl,” the question is whether he has successfully combined an intellectual satire on society with individual psychology. He begins the play in the mode of Ionesco's The Bald Soprano, an amusing exposure of society fatuities, but veers away from it into probings of psychological order.

The visual setting of The American Dream implies lack of communication, as in his earlier play, The Zoo Story. Mommy and Daddy are discovered at the beginning of the play, seated in two separated chairs set down in a barren living room. The dialogue indicates disorder in the malfunctioning household where the icebox and the doorbell are out of order and the toilet doesn't work.<sup>9</sup> In this parody of the American symbols of a good life, caricatured Mommy and Daddy are dependent on the outside world to assist them not only in righting the physical evidences of disarrayed house, but also for standards of judgement.

When we took this apartment, they were quick enough to have one sign the lease, they were quick enough to take my check for two month's rent in advance. . . . .  
But now, try to get the icebox fixed, try to get the doorbell fixed, try to get the leak in the johnny fixed! Just try it . . . they aren't so quick about that (pp. 57, 58).

Mrs. Barker, an embodiment of the “they”<sup>10</sup> who fix things, arrives. She fills a multiple role as symbol of an outside society, as chairman of Mommy's women's club and final arbiter of Mommy's taste, as worker for the Bye-Bye Adoption Agency which was responsible for selling Mommy and Daddy an adopted son who failed to please and has died of wounds inflicted on him by his adopting parents, as the “they” who will give parents “satisfaction”, a term which runs throughout the play with amusing application to sexual as well as material affairs. Mrs. Barker is a comprehensive figure of external moral and social authority which includes the disposition and the fate of children within the family. She is a comic butt of satire.

In this family, the youth who has died was emasculated and literally destroyed by Mommy. By means of an amusing trick of substitution by Grandma – a canny figure whom Albee establishes as the truth – teller and *raisonneur* in the family – a young man without individuality or passion, therefore a model of the splendid American Dream, becomes a replacement for the dead child. He is a living twin, but, deprived of the qualities which Mommy found offensive, he is emotionally and spiritually dead, therefore able to fulfill Mommy's dreams. The American Dream youth is happily accepted by Mommy who finally has the son she wants, a beautiful young man who is unable to love but submits to being loved, a victim shaped to the needs of those about him:

Young Man: We were identical twins . . . he and I

. . . . .  
But we were separated when we were still very young, my brother, my twin and I . . . I have suffered losses . . . Once, my heart became numb . . . and from that time I have been unable to love . . . and since that time I have been unable to see anything, anything, with pity, with affection . . . with anything but . . . cool disinterest. And my groin . . . even there . . . since one time . . . one specific agony . . . since then I have not been able to love anyone with my body . . . I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder, disembowed. I have, now, only my person . . . my body, my face. I use what I have . . . I let people love me . . . I accept the syntax around one, for while I know I cannot relate . . . I know I must be related to. . . . As I told you, I am incomplete . . . I can feel nothing. I can feel nothing. (114, 115)

The Young Man concludes his speech with the comment which reflects his destiny: "It will always be thus". For the final ordering of this household is an empty disorder, matching its physical disarray. The emotional identification of the two halves of the child, the double image of a child sacrificed to a destructive mother, is a psychologically disturbing one. Having begun with the cool, pared-down dialogue of satire and parody, Albee turns to a different mode where turbulent and passionate psychological drama dominates the more objective scene.

Despite shifts between general satire and personal psychology, the view of Mommy is consistent. Mommy is unrelievedly destructive and morally and physically corrupt in The American Dream. The lack of proper name makes her a generic specimen of all Mommies just as the other characters are types representative of other members of the family. The only character in the play with a name is Mrs. Barker, presumably named for the insistent voice of the intrusions of an outside world. Mommy, according to Grandma,

“makes all the trouble. If you’d listen to me, you wouldn’t have married in the first place. She was a tramp and a trollop and a trull to boot, and she’s no better now” (69). The total caricature of Mommy’s materialism and immorality exemplifies the playwright’s view at this point in his development, a view of disorder in both private and public worlds. As a common denominator of evil in both phases of the play – social satire and psychological “drama” – Mommy is consistent and serves as a base for Albee’s ironic views on society as a whole and the American family in particular.<sup>11</sup> In the later plays, the character changes somewhat. Although the “Mommy” of Virginia Woolf and A Delicate Balance retains some of the characteristics of this Mommy, she loses her ascendancy to the male. In the later plays, a softer closure is effected with the view of Mommy’s capacity for acceptance of accommodation, if not actual love.

Yet Albee is not denying the possibilities of rapport between people; it is notable that those possibilities reside in Albee’s mouthpiece for truth, the Grandma. Hamilton has quite correctly identified her as the conscience of the play and its “questing intelligence.”<sup>12</sup> Mommy and Daddy want to get rid of her, as, like the generation she represents, the truth of the past has outlived its usefulness. But Grandma has a close liason of understanding with the Young Man, establishing what Dan Sullivan has called “some hope for the family romance after all.”<sup>13</sup>

In The American Dream, Albee introduces techniques and devices which distinguish his future work. First, the personae of the Albee family make their first real appearances, the domineering Mommy, the arid Daddy, the sympathetic Grandparent, the suffering child. Second, the Insider-Outsider confrontation which is vital to an understanding of the structure of Albee’s plays is born with Mrs. Barker, the first of a long line of outsiders who represent the corruption of exterior values affecting the “house”. Third, the double or mirror image reflecting dual sides of time and character – a device greatly extended in later plays – appears literally in a pair of twins, one living and one dead, allying the child and death as a recurrent motif in Albee.

The metaphor of family as a milieu for social and historical themes begins with The American Dream. The notions of fertility and aridity as exemplified in familial relations are later extended in Virginia Woolf, and particularly in All Over into a broader framework dealing with man’s historic place. In The American Dream, nothing is certain for Mommy and Daddy, representatives of the shifting realities of today’s society, not even

individual desire or taste. In Mommy's parable of the hat, Albee employs the parable technique which is typical of his dramaturgy. Mommy was uncertain of its colour, bought an identical hat taking it for another, always dependent on the judgement of somebody else. Physical objects are unreal; rooms disappear absurdly in that disordered house, Mommy goes for water and can't find it, Daddy can't find Grandma's room which was there but isn't really discoverable. Albee is making a modulation from the examples of silly disconnections of reality within the family to the larger social and contemporary scene, equating the absurdities in both worlds. On the other hand, Grandma has everything tied up in small boxes. She knows where she is and where she is going, she has a history enclosed in the boxes. In a motif which harks back to Jerry's possessions in his room in The Zoo Story and which anticipates the symbol of order in the play called Box-Mao-Box, Grandma finally explains the contents of her precious containers after Mommy and Daddy, caught up in ephemera, repeatedly refuse to be interested or to understand the real memorabilia of a life-time: "some old letters, a couple of regrets . . . Pekinese, blind at that . . . the television . . . my Sunday teeth . . . eighty-six years of living . . . (120). Albee employs the imagery of these boxes as concealing the elusive realities of life which Daddy and Mommy and Mrs. Barker are unable to see. For Grandma, they are the abiding and permanent things, her intimate properties, objective correlatives of a genuine self. The removal of Grandma from the house implies the inherent schism between the realities of a known past and the unrealities of an uncertain present – a theme which absorbs Albee in later plays.

Lee Baxandall has placed an historical interpretation on the whole roster of Albee characters in all plays, including The American Dream, according to epochs in American history. He states that "three generations comprise Albee's archetypal family: Then, the epoch of a still-dynamic national ethic and vision, Now, a phase which breaks down into several tangents of decay, and Nowhere, a darkly prophesied future generation. Only two characters are left over from Then; Grandma . . . and a *pater-familias* or patriarch who is occasionally mentioned but never appears."<sup>14</sup> In The American Dream the child is seen in the context of a real family as compared with Jerry's Mom and Pop who are shadowy figures in the background or empty spaces in a picture frame.

When Grandma has her confidential discussion with Mrs. Barker, Grandma relates the story of the child adopted twenty years earlier in order to explain to Mrs. Barker why

she has come to see Mommy and Daddy. Grandma lapses into the story-telling attitude; “Once upon a time. . .” (96). She proceeds to tell the story with only a slight disguise: “There was a man very much like Daddy, and a woman very much like Mommy. . . .” Grandma is playing a word game with Mrs. Barker, but Mrs. Barker later reveals that she is unable to understand the rationale between Grandma’s use of the word “like” and the visit to Mommy and Daddy. It is certainly probable that twenty years ago, they all were not as they are now. What Mommy and Daddy wanted was “a bumble of joy.” Mrs. Barker states, “Oh, like a bundle” (97). Grandma says, “Bundle, bumble, who cares?” (98). The substitution of the word “bumble” becomes significant when it is revealed that what Mommy and Daddy wanted is comparable to a “bumbling idiot.” Also, with her rhetorical question, Grandma re-emphasizes the lack of concern not merely for words, but for the thoughts and ideas which they should transmit.

The story is filled with indications of Mommy’s and Daddy’s sexual sterility and mental impotence. The baby is bought, as one buys a commodity, and what follows is a tale of child abuse which is related through the use of clichés of the body: “It cried its heart out, “Mommy gouged those eyes right out of its head,” (99), Mommy and Daddy castrated the child and cut its hands off for developing “an interest in its you-know-what,” they “cut its tongue out” for calling Mommy “a dirty name” (100). As the child grew, Mommy and Daddy discovered that “it didn’t have a hand on its shoulders, it had no guts, it was spineless, its feet were made of clay. . . .” (101). The literal use of the clichés temper the horror of the story with the ridiculous. This combination, which gives the story its meta-realistic effect, is further compounded by Mommy’s and Daddy’s actions after the child died, naturally Mommy and Daddy resented its death, “their having paid for it, and all.” They proceed to demand satisfaction from the agency, which supports the idea that the child was treated as a commodity: “They wanted their money back. That’s what they wanted” (101). This attitude further illustrates their crass complacency. The child meant no more to them than the fixtures they could not fix. Instead of enabling the child to explore as children do, Mommy and daddy not only emasculated him, but left him unable to learn sensorality. He was thus not merely dehumanised, he was given the attribute of “thing-ness”. The logical conclusion is that the child became being-as-object-corpse. The child was permitted no life, and therefore was beyond Death-in-life.

After Grandma finishes telling her story to Mrs. Barker (who can only say, “My, my, my” (101), Mommy and Daddy are heard wandering around off-stage, unable to find not only Grandma’s television and Pekinese, but also such illogical things to lose as the water and Grandma’s room. This is a situation of incomprehensible inanity, for they cannot accomplish what any trainable retardate can learn to do. It is amid this confusion that the Young Man enters, greeted first by Grandma, who has the same reaction of pleasure as the Grandma of The Sandbox. Again, both Grandma and the young man admire his muscles, while he flexes them to justify her admiration, as well as his own. He is likewise considering an acting career. As Grandma says, he should be “right up there on the old silver screen.” The young man agrees that his face is handsome:

Yes, it’s quite good, isn’t it? Clean-cut, midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile . . . (107).

What the young man has described is the prototype of the traditionally acceptable American young man, judged on the basis of physical appearance and surface reaction. Grandma explains the meaning of his self-description:

Yup. Boy, you know what you are, don’t you? You’re the American Dream, that’s what you are. All those other people, they don’t know what they’re talking about. (108)

The tendency at this point is to regard the young man as a symbol, and his mental and emotional vacuity justifies the symbolism as well as clarifies it. The clean, honest good-hearted, and pleasant looking young man is considered by American society to embody the potential to fulfill the dream of success. As the young man says of himself, “I’m a type” (113). But the required conformity constitutes that middle-classed deformity Grandma earlier mentions. The young man does not care what kind of work he performs; “I’ll do almost anything for money” (109). He will help Grandma only if “there’s money in it” (110). He is unsure of most things and seems to have little or no recall. He explains,

It’s that I have no talents at all, except what you see . . . my person, my body, my face. In every other way I am incomplete, and I must therefore . . . compensate” (113).

The young man’s story reveals that he was the identical twin of the child Mommy mutilated and murdered, the young man is without grace, innocence, heart, sight, or sexual potency:

I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder . . . disemboweled. I have, now, only my person . . . my body, my face. I use what I have . . . I let people love me.. I accept the syntax around us, for while I know I cannot relate . . . I know I must be related to. As I told you, I am incomplete . . . I can feel nothing. I can feel nothing (115).

This statement presents a complete picture of spiritual sterility.

The implication involved in this presentation of the young man is that the Mommies and Daddies of the world have destroyed the founding idealism of the American Dream. Because of “complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity” of such members of society, the American Dream is now only an outward form. It has no further substance than the alphabetical letters which form its name. These people try only for the trite aspects of life, the basic value is money rather than accomplishment, personal dignity means only that the real truth is not recognized or stated, and language is limited to a group of stylized, meaningless forms. The Mommies and Daddies of the world refuse to think or feel, what they live is the life-lie to the extreme, an existence of total inauthenticity. In a society in which sterility has become a way of life, all that is left is a crude deformity of what man could be. Thus, as Mommy and Daddy accept the young man as a substitute for Grandma, it is understood that their trite hopes are bound in a dead and thus futile future.<sup>15</sup> Unlike in The Sandbox, Grandma does not physically die. As Albee states, Grandma “departs from a form of life a great deal more dead than anything else”.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as in Jerry’s case (The Zoo Story), Grandma makes a decisive act to remove herself from the Death-in-life situation around her. At the end of the play, Grandma has already left the play. But she returns to the audience’s view to make the last statement of the play:

Well, I guess that just about wraps it up. I mean, for better or worse, this is a comedy, and I don’t think we’d better go any further. No, definitely not. So, let’s leave things as they are right now . . . while everybody’s happy . . . while everybody’s got what he wants . . . or everybody’s got what he thinks he wants. Good night, dears (127).

This is the statement of The American Dream directed to the audience, and its inclusive “everybody” implies that the members of the audience are involved in the same situation portrayed on the stage. As Anne Poolucci states, the play is “an incisive comment on the lie in us all.”<sup>17</sup> Grandma indicates that if the play were to continue, it would no longer be comic, for the future of those in such a situation is not pleasant or amusing. Mental, emotional, and spiritual sterility can only lead to a future continuation of what Grandma has called “an age of deformity.”

## References

1. Wagner, Walter, ed., The Playwrights Speak (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967) 61.
2. Richard E. Amacher – adopting some Aristotelian criteria for this little play as for other Albee works – observes that it moves through a complex design of “recognition” to a destined close. He states that the design is “complex,” not because it reverses itself but because it does not. The general line of the plot is unchanged from beginning to end, Grandma dies. But the plot is complex because it contains recognition, or discovery . . . a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined . . . for good or bad fortune.” Richard E. Amacher. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 177.
3. This authorial note, while of course not transmittable in performance, points up Albee’s stress on “doubling”, the reflecting of a character in multiple embodiments. This insertion is similar to a textual comment in the much later play, All Over, where in almost identical language, Albee equates two separate personae in the play.
4. Cohn has remarked on the similarity of monograms in American Dream youth and the Angel of Death. Cohn, Ruby. Edward Albee, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 77 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1969) 13.
5. Wellwarth, George E. “Hope Deferred: The New American Drama”, Literary Review, 7 (1963) 274-84.
6. Rutenberg, Michael E. Edward Albee – Playwright in Protest (New York: DBS Publications, 1969) 43.
7. Bigsby, C.W.E. Edward Albee. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969) 30.
8. Edward Albee. “The American Dream” in Two Plays by Edward Albee. (New York: Signet Classics, The New American Library, Inc., 1961) (53-54). All subsequent references are to this edition.
9. Michael Rutenberg carries his social and political bias into an extra-textual interpretation of the broken down household, observing that the “refrigerator represents our hunger drive, which is at the moment now being taken care of adequately. The broken down bathroom suggests that waste is piling [sic] up in this grotesque household. The broken doorbell symbolizes the family’s isolation.”  
Rutenberg, Michael. Edward Albee – Playwright in Protest, p. 64.
10. Albee’s fascination with the plural pronoun replacing the singular pronoun becomes more visible in later works, especially in Tiny Alice.
11. Debusscher views the play as a comment on the American institution of “momism”. Debusscher, Gilbert. Edward Albee, Tradition and Renewal. Brussels: American Studies Center, 1967.
12. Kenneth Hamilton, “Mr. Albee’s Dream,” Queen’s Quarterly, 70 (1963) 393-99.
13. Dan Sullivan. “Albee’s Bessie Smith and Dream Revived,” New York Times, (3 Oct., 1968) 55.
14. Lee Baxandall. “The Theatre of Edward Albee,” Tulane Drama Review, 9:2 (Summer 1965) 19-40.
15. Ibid., p. 20.
16. Rutenberg, Michael. “Interview with Edward Albee”, in Edward Albee – Playwright in Protest, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
17. Paolucci, From Tension to Tonic, p. 29.

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## Ecology as a Mode: The Poetry of D.C. Chhabial and Kulbhushan Kushal

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Indian English literature, particularly fiction, has received unprecedented acclaim all over the world in recent times. There have been a number of writers who have won prestigious literary awards like the Booker and even the Nobel Prize for their fictional writings. At home also, Indian-English fiction has gained enviable popularity, prestige and critical attention. On the other hand, Indian English poetry has suffered neglect despite valuable contributions being made by Indian English poets. It can be ascertained from the number of critical studies and academic research in fiction and poetry. The Indian English literary scene also points out an interesting fact about the attitude of critics and the writers involved in the evaluation and writing of fiction and poetry. Whereas the established writers of fiction and the critics allow much space for the blossoming of new writers, the emerging poetic voices seem to struggle against the aura of the established earlier poets that tends to smother their growth. The fiction writers are appreciated and eulogized for experimentation in themes and techniques that mark their difference from the earlier writers. On the other hand, the poets are usually expected to follow the standards set by the earlier poets. In spite of such attitudinal compulsions there are poets who concentrate on contemporary issues in their own way. Their poetry marks a discernable shift from earlier romantic, religious, moral and purely aesthetic concerns to the issues that find greater relevance in the present times in philosophical and experiential terms.

The present study concentrates on the poetry of D.C. Chhabial and Kulbhushan Kushal to explore how contemporary Indian English poets weave global concerns into Indian philosophical thought and cultural ethos. Their concerns do not remain strictly related to Indian social reality and exhibit an awareness of the problems related to the exploitation of nature unmindful of the consequences. These poets assert how these problems eventually demand the adoption of a view of life that advocates harmony between the human and the non-human world. Such a view understands dharma or religion freed from scriptural doctrines or one's duty to do good to one's fellow human beings. It extends the concept of brotherhood to the elements of the non-human world, in other words, to ecology and our surroundings. Consequently, their vision of life spreads across political boundaries, social or cultural and ethnic groups and understands human existence as essentially tied to our surroundings. Their poetry expresses how the culture of gold-digging impacted by lust for material wealth has led human beings to molest and bruise ecology and environment. Their treatment of nature may inspire us to call them nature poets in the traditional sense of the word also but their primary concern to raise a voice against dilapidation and mutilation of nature and an understanding that to harm nature is to harm ourselves brings them closer to eco- critics. It makes the treatment of ecological concerns a form of poetic mode to include broader concerns and issues into their poetry.

As true champions of environmental protection and preservation of nature they reject the prevalent attitude towards nature. According to this view nature and the world surrounding us has value only for human beings and the way they consider it in utilitarian terms. Therefore the use of technology to tame and exploit nature to any extent is justified and acceptable. This view is understood to be “anthropocentric i.e. man centered, which is directly opposed to the biocentric i.e. the earth centered view. But this anthropocentric view is strongly contested in the poetry of D.C.Chambial and Kulbhushan Kushal as they too like, “Deep ecologists reject merely technical solutions; because these constitute yet another form of human dominance”, and sharing the concern of the deep ecologists these poets, “advocate a bio-centric world which recognizes non-human world as having value independently of its usefulness to human beings, who have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs.” (Waugh 2006:36). Chambial points out how nature resents human dominance through excessive use of technological and scientific power and skill:

Those who brag to have subjugated

The nature with leaping aspirations

Send satellites into space

Despite meticulous skill

They tumble down, a house of cards (Chambial, 2004:59).

The tumbling down of the huge structures reveals that nature too reacts like an over oppressed person. It reveals a symbiotic understanding and attitude of the poet that treats nature and environment as an independent entity and suggests the need for a mutually reciprocating attitude between nature and human beings.

A similar concern is expressed by Kulbhushan Kushal in his poem ‘Dance of Sirens’ where he equates sea waves with sirens. He feels that the sea storm is the result of human attempts to subjugate and obliterate nature:

Planting marines

In their wombs

Made them furious (Kushal, 2005: 79)

Nature has its own laws and values and for ages ‘The water left man alone’ and felt contended like a mother who overlooks some frivolities of her sons. But the excessive plundering of nature forces her to react in the form of ‘Jupiter’s thunder’, ‘To chastise the astray sons, And the daughters’. Kushal, like a true ecologist feels that nature reacts, even if violently, to restore environmental balance and asserts her existence independent of man’s control and thoughts about nature.

The awareness about ecology that proposes happy co-existence of the human and the natural world, these poets assert, leads to an appreciation of the moral and the spiritual faculties of man. Instead of treating nature as something dead and lifeless, its role as a living organism has to be considered. For this, ecologists emphasize that a change of our attitude towards nature and the way we use it is a must for a better civilization: “Deep ecology proposes drastic changes in

our habits of consumption, not only to avert catastrophe but as spiritual and moral awakening” (Waugh 2006:36). These ideas imply that the way we ‘consume’ i.e. use nature ultimately has a deep impact on our lives. D.C. Chambial’s poem ‘This Promising Age’ brings out the consequences of our plundering of nature and destroying it to develop stony structures:

Brooks and parks  
Mysteriously disappeared  
in the forced isolation  
as glass aquaria stepped into  
a room of hundredth storey steel house (Chambial,2004:7)

The poet also hints at the degeneration that our plundering of nature results in :

Passions degenerated  
into mechanized smiles  
while coming and going  
lips frigid to flowery kisses  
inside the tube (Chambial,2004:7).

All these result in the emergence of ‘synthetic cultures and ideals’. Lacking an awareness of the possible results of our misdirected use of nature people fall into a trap of taking the virtual for the real. Such an attitude hampers moral and spiritual growth.

People’s misunderstanding that leads them to take virtual for the real is the result of their estrangement from nature. It has brought degeneration into human relationships. Even the most sacred relation between the mother and child gets impacted due to the excessive and unethical use of technology. The natural process of giving birth to a child informs moral depravity when we find:

A business minded mother  
decides to be pregnant  
for those who do not want  
to lose their shape (Chambial,2004:8)

It marks the height of moral depravity that has entered the natural human process of procreation. Apart from this, a loss of concern for values introduces an unhealthy trend in motherly affection and the attitude towards the mother. Kushal expresses the synthetic nature of this relationship that shows people’s misplaced concern for values: Now even a mother has become an ornamental object. Our attitude that sees nature only in terms of its use value has also impacted an understanding of parent –child relationship pointed out by the poet in ‘Sanitized mother’:

Please take real mothers away

Substitute please

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I am not asking for

The real mothers

.....

I want a mother

With a smile pasted on her face

Looks moist, face angelic (Kushal, 2005:38)

And to cater to this demand, the other persona in the poem offers;

The mother you may display

In your drawing room

And show all those

Who matter not (Kushal, 2005:38)

Ironically, this attitude speaks of our replacement of plastic flowers for the real ones in our drawing rooms. It shows how our understanding of nature has an extremely decisive role that influences our thinking about human relationships. Instead of the real, man prefers the plastic, artificial and the unnatural. This view is further strengthened when we see that the ‘sanitized mother’ here is more of a picture or an image of the mother that one cherishes in accordance with the requirements of the business world. The child here wants to decide the kind of mother that suits his social status. Just like human beings treat nature as something to be used according to their requirements. In both the cases, the ‘other’ i.e. the mother and the Mother Nature are treated as objects.

The implied similarities in human attitude and treatment of nature and the understanding of human relationships indicate that human existence is tied to nature in multiple ways. The poems of D.C. Chambial and Kulbhushan Kushal support this view through the assertion of an interconnection between all lives. The presence of nature in its various forms in the poetry of these writers shows how it plays an active role in human life. In their poetry, “The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Buell 1995:7). These poets seem to suggest that all species on this earth have sanctity of their own and there exists an inseparable bond between them.

Another belief that the two poets seem to share about nature and the non-human world that surrounds us is that, “non-human others have their own value and humans cannot judge them based on their knowledge about them.” (Kumaran, 2009: 16.). The attitude based on human

knowledge about nature and animals alienates them from the non-human world and humans tend to degrade them or take them as something fixed and taken for granted. These poets try to add a different perception by highlighting the value of these objects of nature through the idea of the existence of a bond between man and nature as well as man and the animals. They do not treat these entities as just trees, rivers earth or dogs and cats as they believe that animals and trees etc also have their own grace.

Kushal's poem 'Intimate Strangers' reveals that man may be blind to his relation with his surroundings and behave like a stranger, but there does exist an intimate relation between man and nature, only man has to develop an awareness to realize this. Kushal talks about a symbiotic relation between man and trees in attempt to resolve the doubts, 'How I am related with the trees' when he suggests the nature of their common responses:

But I have seen them trembling  
When there is an earthquake  
I have seen them frightened  
When the lightning  
Strikes across the skies  
I have seen them.  
Lost in deep meditation (Kushal, 2008:27)

Similarly, Chambial's poem 'Manacles' shows similarity of attitudes between human beings and animals:

Do not make me a pet  
like a bird in a cage  
Or puppy in the lap  
Nor enthrall  
in the manacles  
Of your freedom ((Chambial, 2004:36)

The enslavements that man does not like to experience are also abhorred by animals. In similar situations, the humans and the non-humans undergo the some kind of humiliation and helplessness.

The non-human world that surrounds human life has the potential to provide meaningful messages to man. This world also serves the purpose of comparison that brings new awareness and has the ability to provide moral lessons. The world of nature is not merely an object of

observation or limited to spectacular scenes only that human beings have often taken it to be. The words of Berger that animals, "...are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance" (Berger 1980), point out the centralized way of thinking that people have about the world of nature. According to these views humans are treated to be the centre and the animals and natural objects as the 'other'. D.C. Cambial's poem 'The Difference' contests this view based on binary understanding. In this poem, the creatures like hen tend to acquire the central position as the human mother is suggested to learn motherly lessons from hen. A hen scares away the cat from her chicken whereas in the human world, A cat

seizes the bowl of milk  
from the hands of a baby  
whose father drudges in office  
the mother at the type-writer,  
dreams to spend the evening  
at some fashionable discotheque  
and listen to music. (Chambial, 2004:72).

In his poem, 'Dogs' Kushal also suggests to shun stereotypical attitude indicated by Berger in the earlier quoted lines. The poet emphasizes the evolvement of a different perception concerning human attitude towards animals like dogs: Instead of treating them as observed we should also treat them as observing us:

Dogs may laugh at us  
At our contrived faces  
At our gullibility  
As we believe  
We are sleeping  
And they are awake! (Kushal, 2008:58).

Kushal's view about the harmony between man and nature, seeks a symbiosis between the two. Their happy co-existence and a healthy balance evolve in Kushal's poetry as a form of eco-dharma. His poetry thus can be seen as a prayer for the welfare of the whole universe. This universal welfare can be achieved, Kushal seems to convey in his poetry, through the promotion of awareness about the role of ecology and nature in human life. This becomes a kind of new dharma in the contemporary scenario as Skolimowski avers, "True Prayer and true meditation in our time becomes ecological prayer—such a form of meditation and action which helps to heal the planet which helps to heal other human beings, which helps to heal all other beings—including the forests, soil and polluted rivers."(Skolimowski, 1999: 14) Conforming to the ideas of eco-

dharma Kushal ironically prays to the elements of nature to remain away from human beings as they have become aliens to nature:

We are aliens

Alienated beings (Kushal, 2008:35)

And man's alienation has corrupted him to the extent that his proximity with nature invariably obliterates it. Therefore the poet with a concern for their sanctity prays to the elements of nature:

We pray to you

Please stay away from us

Our touch shall temper your heat

Shall steal your warmth

And shall rob your sacredness ((Kushal, 2008: 37)

This ecological prayer of the poet seeks to keep the purity of the seasons, trees, rivers, sky and the earth. It shows his condemnation of man's exploitation of nature. Due to the technological advancement man feels empowered to use nature without bothering about the consequences and its degenerating impact on nature. Man's unconcern for nature that results from his treatment of nature as dead objects plays havoc with it. Kushal indirectly makes a plea to treat nature as a living organism. He is highly critical of the attitude expressed in these lines:

We eat what you give

And in turn we pollute

Your heavenly stretch

With our curses (Kushal, 2008: 36)

The poet treats human beings as unworthy of living in touch with nature as they fail to be grateful for the gifts that nature bestows on us. Man's attitude that shows his dominating and oppressive attitude towards nature goes against Eco-justice that envisions underlying equality between human as well as non-human worlds.

Eco critics also highlight nature culture divide as a source of man's troubles and sufferings. The divisions amongst human beings based on different cultural systems are human constructions. The traits associated with the 'high' and the 'low', good and the bad or civilized and the uncivilized are not in accordance with the plan of nature. Nature here is perceived as a divine force that nourishes and governs all forms of life in terms of equality. The treatment of difference in human beings on the basis of these cultural constructs is not fundamental, transcendental or 'natural'. According to these perceptions peace is not the purpose of culture but nature that sees no differences and follows no discriminations:

No men strangers, no land foreign;

Everywhere shine the same sun and moon;  
The spring brings buds and flowers forth  
The clouds rain, the birds sing, Rivers flow  
And air blows. Meddle not with their course.  
We want peace. Give us peace. (Chambial, 2004:60).

How human intervention and exploitation of nature prompts nature to react in order to establish ecological balance forms another major concern of these poets. The natural calamities, these poets feel, are a kind of reaction that nature expresses. The disturbance in the basic harmony is disliked by nature. It is there not as something passive and dead. It has its own values and norms apart from its usefulness to man. Talking about the floods, Kushal expresses this view about nature:

The floods are here again  
To remind us  
How our anarchy has robbed  
The peace of the earth. (Kushal, 2005:59)

The happenings like floods and earthquakes also form a kind of warning and reminder that  
how our ears have stopped  
Listening to the music  
Of water, fire, earth  
Either and wind. (Kushal, 2005:59)

The contemporary human culture has destroyed nature to such an extent that even the human existence on this earth stands endangered. With little regard for rehabilitation or restoration of the nature and ecology that has been destroyed man has turned into a parasite. He knows how to extract maximum benefits from nature without ever thinking to give her back its due. According to Eugene P Odum, "Until now man has generally acted as a parasite on his autotrophic environment, taking what he needs with little regard to the welfare of the host." (Odum, 1995:233) Man's ingratitude towards his environment, ecology and nature has destroyed his surroundings beyond recognition and this has the potential to cause great harm to human civilization. Eugene P Odum also suggests, "If man does not learn to live mutualistically with nature then like the unadapted parasite he may exploit his host to the point of destroying himself" (Odum, 1995: 233). Similar situation is presented in D.C. Chambial's poem, 'Testimony' in which we find:

To satiate inner urge  
a super-scientist



in a super-lab

fired life ! (Chambial, 2004:76).

But ultimately ‘Super-Scylla’ created by this scientist ran out, ‘devouring and devastating’ when non-left, recalled upon father, to satiate the devil in stomach (76). It shows how human tendency to rob, dominate, exploit and destroy nature may ultimately destroy all these things and human beings too. .

Thus these poets express their awareness about the dangers that human race has to encounter due to excessive plundering of nature and contamination of environment. At the same time they express a firm faith in an inseparable bond and harmony between human world and the environment that surrounds it. Their major poetic achievement here lies in expressing this concern without a specific consideration for geo-political terms. Another special feature of their poetry in this connection is their contribution to our perception about the human and the non-human world. Instead of simply extending and intensifying our perceptions through the use of poetic devices like images, symbols, rhythm etc. to defamiliarize the familiar, they insert new reality orientations to our perceptions. It becomes a potent poetic mode in both these poets. These elements certainly point out the shift that contemporary Indian-English Poetry is headed towards that will certainly broaden its horizons extending from the Indian to the global.

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# **HOODOO DETECTIVE PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN ISHMAEL REED'S NOVELS**

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the essential features of hoodoo detective is the issue of the African American civilisation. To probe the mysteries of this civilisation, it is appropriate that Reed uses the detective genre, essentially as a novel of suspense, in order to structure the novel. The conventions of this genre enable him to depict a world of conflicting powers which the detective must investigate and explain. While there are several layers of time in the novel, the main plot unfolds during the 1920s and concerns the apparently inexplicable outbreak of the plague in his novels.

Reed signifies on the discovery of truth pattern in the detective fiction. Structure in his novel is shaped in part by the structure of the traditional detective story. He uses that form as a skeletal structure for the basis of the narrative. Through the variety of personal life histories Reed tried “to redeem Black history from oblivion, correct the false account of White historians and make future Black generation aware of their proud heritage” (Wells 4-5). This paper analyses the reflection on the Black literary tradition and its relationship to Western literary forms played in the Hoodoo detective. The detective fails to solve the crime or find the truth. The missing text destroys any expectation of a closed conventional ending and reaffirms the text’s sense of indeterminacy. To Reed his novels do improvise upon the conventions of the traditional detective story [much in the same way the jazz musicians are expected to improvise on the standard composition].

In criminal investigations, detectives apply different thinking styles, such as method style, challenge style, skill style and risk style. In a survey in Norway, detectives were asked to list the five most important characteristics of effective investigators. This was done in a free format, requiring content analysis to categorise responses. Responses were categorised according to thinking styles. While creativity was the most frequently mentioned characteristic, content analysis shows that the skill style of detectives is the most effective thinking style. To be effective, detectives need to practice good empathic communication, open-minded curiosity, logical reasoning, creative thinking and dogged determination. The detective that consistently solves difficult cases is often said to have luck. While this may be partially true, it is probably only a small portion of what really makes the detective effective. To be an effective detective, in addition to that, being adequately prepared, one must also possess and develop certain essential traits. Some of these traits are self discipline and reasoning ability.

Every successful detective must possess a high degree of self discipline. This self discipline helps the detective's behavior to ensure that only legally acceptable and ethical methods of investigation are utilised to solve cases. A successful detective always approaches the case with an alert and fastidious attention to detail and never leaves anything to chance. All steps of the investigation must be carefully calculated and chances never taken that might jeopardise the case. Similarly, reasoning is based on the detective's ability to draw conclusions from evidence discovered in the course of an investigation. The ability to analyse a multitude of facts, and determine how they interrelate, is basic to a successful investigation. Although law enforcement officers practice this trait on a regular basis, this mental challenge is a routine part of being a detective.

Detectives are viewed as experts in many regards. Along with this recognition comes the responsibility for developing a case, while acting in a responsible and ethical manner. Most people have the ability to draw good conclusions from a set of facts. This conclusion does not necessarily have to agree with the conclusion other detectives have drawn [there can be an honest disagreement among reasonable people]. The problem arises when a detective is not willing to realise or admit that his/her bias is influencing his/her course of action.

## **STRATEGIES OF DETECTIVE FICTION**

Detective fiction is a branch of crime fiction that centers upon the investigation of a crime, usually murder, by a detective, either professional or amateur. It is the most popular form of both mystery fiction and hardboiled crime fiction. It is a stand-alone course and it examines, American and British detective fiction and the cultures in which these texts are literary created one. The American hard boiled approach versus the British arm chair approach to this genre, looking at characteristics which include narrative structures, plot devices, themes, stylistic flourishes, characterisations, and the function of detective heroes within the stories. Research scholars have the opportunity to research and read the major writers of detective fiction and explore how many of these authors have used detective fiction as social commentary, and, how, at the very least, their texts reflect the values, achievements, and social structures of their time.

Detective fiction, a genre once considered mostly fluff, abounds with good writing and trenchant social criticism. Although in the latter, teachers

of literature should be aware of the former as they consider whether or not to use detective fiction in their classes. Because of the latter, however, parts of the chapters could be used in classes of history, sociology, women's studies, African American studies, or even Native-American studies. The novels in this unit deal with themes of identity, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, assimilation, and discrimination.

But for the more traditional teacher of literature, the novels also contain complex protagonists and intricate plots. Hence they can be used to study characters and to analyse the structure and conventions of plot and narrative. The settings range from the rural to the urban, including the suburban, and these settings often play an integral role in developing aspects of the characters and the plots. This is to say, all the elements of good literature are here, and the added advantage of trying to solve a mystery alongside a fascinating detective in a clearly evoked setting.

While each novel in the paper will be dealt with separately to exploit what is interesting and unique about it, there are certain elements common to most literary works within the detective fiction genre that should be established at the beginning of the paper itself. These include a detective, a crime or mystery that needs to be solved, clues, suspects, and the positive identification of the culprit or solution to the mystery based on the clues given.

## **BLUES DETECTIVE**

The above statement is taken from the work of Stephen F. Soitos, whose text 'The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction' provides what Soitos calls "major tropes" that have "transformed [the detective fiction tradition]" These tropes include: "the detective persona, black vernaculars, and hoodoo" (11). Laura said to Soitos by introducing his writing that:

Black detective writers use African American detective tropes on both classical and hardboiled detective conventions to create a new type of detective fiction. Through the use of black detective personas . . . , black vernaculars, and hoodoo creations, African American detective writers signify on elements of the detective genre to their own ends. (BIDF 3)

These tropes not only apply to the novels of the African American writers in the unit, such as Walter Mosley and Barbara Neely, but, by replacing the words black and African American with Indian and Native American, they can be shown to apply to the novels of Tony Hillerman. According to Soitos, the fictional black detectives in his study identify strongly with their blackness and "all of them are aware, and make the reader aware, of their place within the fabric of their black society" (29). He further explains that "Black detectives are intimately connected to their surroundings, often involved in family relations, certainly deeply committed to exploring the meaning of blackness in the text" (31).

The blues detective creates a different set of priorities than either the classical or hardboiled detective. Rather than focusing simply on the crime and capture of the suspect, the blues detectives are interested in the social and political atmosphere. This social and political atmosphere is inscribed by racial prejudice. The blues detective recognises his or her own blackness as well as what blackness means to the characters in the text. Soitos use the term hoodoo to represent indigenous, syncretic, religions of African Americans in the New World, expanding the term to suggest that it also represents alternative worldviews of some black Americans. Soitos goes on to explain what he means by alternative worldviews:

The most important aspect of hoodoo . . . is the pervasive influence of its combined beliefs in creating an alternative belief system . . . These alternative systems include all of the common African philosophies such as ancestralism, belief in a higher life force, and the concept of full ontological being, which can include aspects of divination, animism, and spiritual awareness, through magic and conjure. (47)

Reed thinks that the Western novel is tied to Western epistemology. So it is usually realistic and has character development and all these things that one associates with the Western novel. Deconstructing his novels becomes a metaphor for deconstructing Western metaphysics.

## **DECONSTRUCT THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE DETECTIVE SUBGENRE**

Reed's Mumbo Jumbo is a busy and noisy novel. The pastiche of parody and satire clamours are the reader's attention for laughter. The novel



is what Bakhtin calls a carnivalesque text [a media theory], one seeking to capture the comic spirit in a jaded, overly rationalised and standardised age. In the novel, Reed offers the healing power of laughter as an antidote to the plague of tragedy – to him, essentially an exalted form of rationalism that has been the bane of Western Civilisation. The seeds of it are there in the possibilities inherent in Jes Grew and in the figure of LaBas who stands for and points to the meeting of the real World and the spiritual World.

In addition to the satire of cultural politics and the fervent declarations of aesthetic independence, Mumbo Jumbo is a novel concerned with pedagogy and epistemology. It has forays into myth and legend. It is also a revisions of history seek to challenge and dismantle our assumptions and conceptions about knowledge and truth. The novel seeks to undermine artifice of conventional history and to remind them that there are other ways of knowing and other things to know.

This detective novel, in Mumbo Jumbo evinces Reed's desire to deconstruct the epistemology of the detective subgenre, with its emphasis on realism, linearity and ratiocination. Unlike the brooding, the hard boiled sleuths of American fiction, Reed's detective, LaBas, is above all else intuitive. His name, as Gates has noted, suggests both the Voudou loa (deity) Esu, in Haiti called Legba, a pan-African trickster figure. LaBas, a phrase used in New Orleans jazz recordings of the '20s and '30s. A "Two-headed man" (or hoodoo) who works out of Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, LaBas eschews empirical evidence, preferring to understand phenomena through dreams and his feelings.

The monologue of the West cannot stand. A polyphonic and heteroglossic conversation must replace it. This is Reed's positive vision of American society, like Robert Hayden. To open up to Jes Grew does not mean that life would be an endless Madrigal, but it would keep it from being a perpetual lent, as the Atonists seem to prefer. The Jes Grew movement is opposed by the Wall flower Order led by Hiero phant one who hires Hinckle Von Vampton, a Knights Templar, and his thugs, Biff Muscle white and Hubert safe cracker Gould, to destroy Jes Grew before it dismantles Western Civilisation. This is not the first time these forces have collided. The conflict in the 1920s, and by extension in the 1960s, is a replay of the ancient struggle between Osiris and sect and the various cults derived from that myth.

The plot of the novel is about the plot to stop Jes Grew from repossessing its ancient text, which connects Jes Grew to a primordial force

and an ancient conflict enshrined in myth but repressed throughout history. While there are murders that Reed's Hoodoo detective LaBas must investigate, Reed is more concerned with the macro crime, the theological and metaphysical betrayal at the root of it all. As LaBas says in the novel's epilogue – which takes place in the late 1960s – “I was a jack legged detective of the metaphysical who was the case” (MJ 212).

## **RACIAL AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

Going back into the past to get some metaphor from the past to explain the present or the future is what he calls necromancy, in the form of prophecy. For Reed the cultural politics of the 1960s seemed to recapitulate what was happening in the 1920s. Both decades are full of political corruption. Racial consciousness is high and intense. The decade of the 1960s was both the Age of Aquarius and the politics of Law and Order. The authority to give the name to an age depends on the choices the culture makes – jazz or prohibition, doing the Eagle Rock or standing on the Plymouth Rock. It is one of the roles of art, as he sees it, to show what choices have been and can be made in this novel.

Reed let Neo-Hoodoo breakout into a fully large enough epidemic in his 1972 novel Mumbo Jumbo. In this novel, both black and white characters are beset by a disease called “Jes Grew” which throws them into dancing fits and makes them unable to function in American society. The novel's hero, a “Hoodoo detective” named LaBas, investigates the plague and in the process constructs the Hoodoo aesthetic that became Reed's Manifesto.

Reed makes plain, however, that some manifestation of Jes Grew would be revived by future generations of artists. The novel is about the near success of the transformation from old to new in the 1920s, an explanation of why Jes Grew did not reach pandemic proportions and change the face of America. Mumbo Jumbo suggests that the current upsurge of artistic activity among black artists is guided by an impulse more favourable to Jes Grew, the determination to reject white forms and recall back. It is not only concerned with the traditional province of fiction but also the registration of individual consciousness. In an interview given after Mumbo Jumbo was published, Reed discusses his concerns in the novel:

I want to go into the mysteries of the American civilisation. The American civilisation has finally got its rhythm; looking into the past you can see the rhythms of this civilisation. So I

stepped back to an age that reminds me of the one I'm writing in. I stepped back to the twenties. Instead of Nixon I invoked Harding. The parallels between the two are remarkable. (CIR 133-34)

As a metaphysical novel, the hoodoo detective LaBas, Reed's man at the borderline of human, combines mystical communication, the phenomenon of the crossroads, on the one hand, and the search for the solution of crimes, on the other. Reed's Mumbo Jumbo is the best mystery novel of the year and there is a problem as to whether or not this humorous experimental work can be classified as a mystery. Carter sees Mumbo Jumbo as:

further extension of the mystery genre into the realm of serious literature... Reed regards the mystery novel as a vehicle for getting at other mysterious, such as the mystery of American civilisation... Obviously Reed is after bigger game than individual evil doers. (IND 8)

According to this view, there is a metaphysical dimension in detective fiction which is down-to-earth-i.e., the mystery is ultimately concerned with matters of this world.

## INDUCTIVE NARRATOLOGY

In The Last Days of Louisiana Red novel, LaBas the Hoodoo detective recovers a spirit from the world of the dead. He tries to solve the murder of a gumbo works owner whose gumbo had been found to cure the illness brought on by forgetting the history. This is a good example to illustrate Reed's notion of metaphysical detection in The Last Days of Louisiana Red. The gumbo is the way to connect back to the spirit of the African past. Neo-Hoodoos' are detectives of the metaphysical about to make a pinch. A writing strategy of detection is replaced by one of induction narratology of detection in the novel.

At this point it should no longer come as a surprise that Reed turns to one of the most popular genres using a retrospective strategy, the detective story as a vessel for his Neo-Hoodooism. This detective story defines a discursive realm in which the very inductive rules of tracing causes from symptoms are constantly thematised. Reed himself extends the notion of mystery when he refers to The Last Days of Louisiana Red as:

A detective novel and a mystery... there are a lot of esoteric things -mysteries - in it, but at the same time it is a detective novel because there are people consciously looking for clues. (IND 8)

According to this view, there is a metaphysical dimension in detective fiction which is down to earth which means the mystery is ultimately concerned with matters of this world. Unlike many white authors for example, Graham Greene, Reed does not aim at reaching a transcendental dimension. Much of Reed's close descriptions and predilections for vivid detail can be traced to Himes's hyper realistic style, which he greatly admires. Reed associates Himes's work with concrete perception and description, quoting Marcel Duhamel, the director of Gallimard's detective story series, who gave the following advice to Himes:

Always action in detail makes pictures. Like motion pictures. Always the scenes are visible. No stream of consciousness at all. We don't give a damn who's thinking what-only what they're doing. Always doing something from one scene to another. Don't worry about making sense. (IND 8)

Though Himes may not offer a lot of free narratology, the abundant use of concrete details in his writing makes an analogy to Reed's possibilities.

Moreover, in both cases they appear textualised like words; the physical traces which Himes's detective ace needs in order to arrest the Harlem hoodlums and the signs which Reed's detective is used to solve metaphysical crimes are phenomenally alike. Description may point in either direction. Both narrative strategies have in common a gesture of detection, which celebrates the inductive approach. It is by the signs that they can recognise the forces, by the manifest details--detectives cannot work without traces, no matter whether they are detectives of the physical or of the metaphysical. In this sense mythic rings of a conspiracy against Black men and white women that only Reed, with his enormous post-rational leaps of causality, could devise-and only detective LaBas, the leading occult troubleshooter in the country could solve.

Louisiana Red Corporation is a criminal mail-order house specialising in juice boxes, black record companies and hard drugs. The novel chapters are narrated by a black minstrel Chorus who holds an old grudge against an actress starring in Antigone who once upstaged his act, and the dialogues of some street people Moochers named such as Andy,

Kingfish and their moralistic compatriot Amos, a loyal Worker for Solid Gumbo. Yellings' was eliminated and a black Mammy in love with a white man is no more a mystery than the conclusion of any Greek drama or super-detective story, even though there will always be Louisiana Red. Reed's hoodoo has a wickedly funny vitality that undermines white European ideology. Ironically, Reed's narratology seem to have given too much emphasis to inductive notions reminiscent of the physical sciences, consider that Reed's narrative gesture also correlates with that of the mythologies, and that it is precisely the original status of knowledge which is different in myth and in history.

## **BLACK LITERARY TRADITION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP OF WESTERN LITERARY FORMS**

Reed's next Neo-hoodoo novel Flight to Canada is a playful reflection on the black literary tradition and its relationship of western literary forms. It is a wildly comic novel that reverses a number of the genre's formulas, in particular the association of freedom with the movement from south to north. The narrator, Raven Quickskill, is an escaped slave who has returned south to tell the story of Uncle Robin. The second half of the novel continues to alternate between scenes in the North with Raven and scenes on the plantation with Swille. Flight to Canada is a conventional novel. The characters do not belong to a world resembling everyday reality.

The major plot of Flight to Canada involves the escape of Raven Quickskill from his owner, Massa Arthur Swille, and Swille's efforts to capture Quickskill. The historical Canada is the eventual destination where Quickskill and other slaves wish to arrive when they run away Virginia, but this historical Canada is not the heaven slaves to think and pray. Yet in the face of the depressing stories about Canada from his friend Leech field, Carpenter, Cato and 40's, Quickskill will not relinquish his dream. For him, Canada is personified beyond the physical plane - it is a metaphor for happiness, be it evil, death, art and liberation in the novel.

Hoodoo time is also liberally dispersed throughout the novel by the usage of contemporary indices. The opening of the novel, which is the poem 'Flight to Canada,' mixes the time of the novel (the 1860s) with the present time. The poem also serves as a synopsis of the action prior to the beginning of the narrative in chapter one. This chapter opens with Raven reflecting "on the writing of the poem: Quickskill" (FC 3 – 5). Later, Cato arms the female slaves to monitor the male slaves, who are excited over the escape of 40s,

Leechfield, and Quick skill. Cato says, “They’ll keep order. They’ll dismember them niggers with horrifying detail” (FC 56). This is an extra – textual reference to the episodes in Gayle Jones’ Corregidora (1973), in which black men were pictured as brutes and brutalised by black women.

Quickskill reflects on The Man Who Cried I Am (1971), by John A. Williams as an indication of how titles tell the tale of the black man’s sojourn in America, and how far that tale has advanced as indicated by the progression of titles, from Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin: The Man who was A Thing (1852), Half A Man by Mary White Overton, (1910) and finally William’s book in 1971.

## SEEN AND UNSEEN FORCES OF HOODOO POWER

As in The Last Days of Louisiana Red Hoodoo also surface in Flight to Canada as a corporeal force. In chapter one, Quickskill asks himself if it is Hoodoo who is writing the poem Flight to Canada and if it is Hoodoo who punishes Stowe for stealing the plot of Uncle Tom’s Cabin from Josiah Henson, an escaped slave. Stowe is quoted as saying that ‘God wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ (FC 11); Quickskill asks, ‘Which God? Some gods will mount anything’ (FC 11).

Later, Swille anthropomorphises Hoodoo as a strong, real influence carried by blacks who have the United States under a spell. Finally, Uncle Robin says that it is the power of Hoodoo which has allowed him to triumph over Swille in the end. In response to Aunt Judy’s assertion that the deception of Swille is an Christian Uncle Robin responds:

I’ve about had it with this Christian. I mean, it can stay, but it’s going to have to stop being so bossy. I’d like to bring the old cults back. This Christian isn’t going to work for us. It’s for desert people. Grey, arid, cold. It’s a New Mexico religion. There’s not a cloud there often, and when they do come, it looks like judgment. Sure was lively out in the woods when they had them horn cults, blacks dressed up like Indians. Everybody could act a fool, under controlled conditions. (FC 171)

Aside from its concept of time, Hoodoo is principally used in this novel as a kind of force which gives the African American protagonists the strength to be direct in the face of seemingly hopeless situations. It becomes a kind of faith which sustains and uplifts without at the same time

necessarily degrading those toward whom it is in opposition. Hoodoo is also the unseen force behind Lincoln's Plunge into the Civil War and his signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The non – fictional Lincoln is portrayed as a man who, at best, was ambiguous about the quality of African Americans.

At one point in the novel, Cato attempts to explain Quickskill's poem, Flight to Canada: "it does not have no redeeming qualities, it is bereft of any sort of precede resistance, is cute and unexpurgated (FC 52). Swille, unimpressed, simply says:

Spare me the cotton. Stuffing, Cato. No one's interested in your critical abilities and you know what they did in the old days to the messenger who brought bad news." Cato is hurt by this: "But, Mr. Swille, you sent me to school for that. To be critical about things. (FC 53)

In Cato's case, being critical without historical perspective this causes his observation to exist within the framework of possibility bounded by current events. Transcendence beyond current event occurs only as a function of what Cato has been socialised to believe as possible by his master and illegitimate father, Arthur Swille. Cato is neither free nor literate, they gibbed him stands as an ironic affirmation of his status as a slave. When a member of an oppressed racial minority decides not to idealise reality based on their own history that individual finds ingenious and always brutal ways to support the status quo. The tradition of which the educated Cato is a part sometimes finds its contemporary to regard in academia, where African American occupy privileged positions (certainly in comparison to the majority of African Americans) not unlike those of the house slaves, Mammy Barracuda and Cato. To be sure, these privileged positions do not insure a consciousness like that of house slaves.

William Julius Williams, Adolph Reed, Jr., and a host of others variously condemn affirmative action programs and almost any attempt at empowerment of African American along racial lines. In the tradition of materialist social scientists who define options in accordance with the seen forces of history, Williams asserts that economic class is the primary determiner of life chances among African Americans. His causal exhortation to blacks is to assume the obligations of citizenship. His argument is that Jesse Jackson's run for the presidency is hopeless. Ultimately, harmful because Jackson will act as a focal point for black concerns and thereby relieve white candidates of the need to speak to those concerns. Essentially,

he argues that because Jackson is not assured of victory he should not run for the Democratic nomination for the presidency. At the very least, this interpretation of current events ignores the dialectic of struggle within African American history. It reflects with examples of individuals posing the impossible, be it ending slavery or eating where one wants to, in the face of odds that, at the very least, seem objectively insurmountable.

For black neoconservatives, black empowerment proceeds along a path defined by those outside the African American experience. It is a static back drop that holds no sway in current politics. One imagines blacks posing in front of one specific historical backdrop to illustrate whatever dramatic historical moment expediency demands, and quite significantly never knowing any motivational connection between themselves and that back drop. The proper socialisation of the slave is not only concerns the obvious manifestations of history but also, and quite profoundly, the more subtle manifestations of people's history as illustrated in their religion and social customs.

## HOODOO TRICKSTER

In The Terrible Twos (1982) Reed uses a contemporary setting to attack the Reagan administration and exploitative nature of the American economic system. The novel is a comic-mythological tour de force, uniting elements of our culture's Christmas story-Dickens's A Christmas Carol, the legend of St. Nicholas, the commercial street-corner Santa Clause into a bizarre satire on greed, racism and inhumanity. Reed chides the United States of the 1980's as a mindless, grasping two-year old, a resources, hope, and compassion, hiding behind a phony costume of charity and concern. Nance Saturday is Reed's African American detective, sets out to discover St. Nicholas's place of exile.

The Terrible Threes are not in the not-so-distant future mostly to undress the Reagan years. The detective, Nance Saturday, who gets lost in the thick plots, remains aloof from the madness of trying to make it in the new white, and becomes celibacy out of a fear of infection. Neo-Hoodooism itself has been pushed offstage entirely by a sort of Gnostic (having mystical knowledge spiritual) sect of questionable sincerity. Characters include President Dean Clift, a former model become-President because he is manipulability by Big Oil. Nance Saturday, black and sexy sleuth on the trail of the real Santa; and Jamaica Queens, a sensual reporter who penetrates the inner Sanctum of the Nicolaites (those who would restore Saint Nicholas to



the church) only to discover Black Peter, everyone's favourite hoodoo man and wizard.

In The Terrible Twos and The Terrible Threes, Reed discovers his hoodoo trickster Black Peter in what appears at first an unlikely source, a major stream of European mythology and legend. Black Peter, a servant who, in the legend of Saint Nicholas, originally "carried Nicholas's bags" (TWOS 81), is transformed into the trickster through a recuperation of two pictures. The first shows Black Peter in a jester's cap with its rooster's comb:

"An illustration of Saint Nicholas, but peeking from behind him is a cox-combed black figure with a bunch of rods sticking out of a pouch he carries on his back. Black Peter!". (TWOS 121)

As phallic images, the rooster's comb and the erect rods also link Black Peter to Blue Coal, the ithyphallic deity of The Last Days of Louisiana Red. The second picture, from a Moscow art gallery, shows Saint Nicholas exorcising a devil, but devil, a "tiny black creature with long body and a big nose and a rooster's crown," (TWOS 121) is another version of Black Peter as trickster. Through this examination of the transformation of Santa Claus into a major icon of Western enterprise, Reed not only recovers the figure of Black Peter, but he finds a connection to the Hoodoo spirit world by pursuing the icon's earliest features in European mythology as he relates Christmas to the "dreadful Winter solstice when the undead, the half dead, and the near dead roamed the world" (TWOS 120-121). A major point made through this examination is that the Hoodoo trickster is omnipresent and irrepressible, something the narrator underscores: "The Americans would soon find out what the Dutch, French, and English had learned before. It's hard to prevent Black Peter from going where he wants to go" (THREES 131).

Reed demonstrates this major point about the irrepressibility of this trickster by organising The Terrible Twos around a modern Black Peter, a ventriloquist with red dreadlocks who displays his power through Hoodoo. Black Peter gives abundant evidence of his Hoodoo power through a dramatic and continued subversion of oppressive authority. First, in a debate with the leader of the Nicolaites, a Christian sect, he astonishes the audience by "using the exact tone and inflection of his opponent's voice" (TWOS 59), wins the debate, and thereby becomes the sect's new leader. Throughout, Reed uses the Hoodoo trickster to present a merciless satire of white infantilism pandered to by greedy bosses whose aim is to make each day a

profitable Christmas and in a particularly subversive image, Reed transforms the familiar sight of Saint Nicholas astride a white horse entering Amsterdam into one in which the black servant as trickster changes roles with his master.

## THE STYLE OF RHETORICAL WORK

Reed's next Neo-Hoodoo novel's title Reckless Eyeballing not only refers Ball's play and Reed's wildly satirical view of American life, but also recalls one of the accusations against Emmett Till, the young Chicago black who was murdered in Mississippi in 1953, for looking and whistling at a white woman. As the novel opens, Ball has written a new play, also called "Reckless Eyeballing", that he hopes will appease powerful New York white feminists and their black women supporters.

Critics have failed to account adequately for Ishmael Reed's Reckless Eyeballing, and generally dismiss it as less interesting than his more controversial early writing. This novel seems more straight forward in the plots and messages, and much less experimental in method. However, this apparent clarity is part of a complex and innovative style. One might characterise this style as "rhetorical" in the broadest and most pervasive sense-that is, its overall narrative strategies at the level of plot, theme and character are constructed primarily on the way the audience can read and even misread the novel. Reed broadens the definition of the rhetorical aspects of the literary text as part of a larger attempt to reformulate how his own works relate to the African American tradition.

Critics have noted that African American writers often are particularly aware of their precursors and tradition. Reed, however, not only carefully situates himself in relation to tradition in the abstract, but also anticipates in the novel's plot and structures the reactions of actual readers who share that tradition only in a problematic way. Indeed, in Reed's fiction this problematic reception of the work becomes the primary content of the novel. The implications of this move force the reader to reconsider how one can trace the African American tradition and to what degree that tradition can remain independent of the readings given it by mainstream American literary culture. Though, to explore such rhetorical workings in one particular novel is Reckless Eyeballing.

Critics and reviewers unanimously agree that Ishmael Reed is assaulting feminism in this novel. His protagonist, Ian Ball, is called a notorious sexist, and yet readers' are invited to suffer with Ball during his

persecution at the hands of powerful women in the theatre world. When Reed climatically summarises Ball's victimisation by revealing him as two-headed man, he seems to be using that common African American trope of black "double-consciousness". This trope defines black consciousness as split into two identities, one acceptable to and partially created by the white hegemony, the other more authentic but disturbing to that same mainstream society.

It is an extraordinarily timely novel that depicts in his usual complex of penetrating satire, surrealism, allegory and farce in the central sources of confusion and pain confronting black man in contemporary society. Reed has insisted here that black experience cannot be the symbols and the form. In this case, the detective formula and the search for selfhood motif (the latter virtually synonymous with serious black writing) but then demolishes these structures by introducing his own distinctive blend of discontinuity and humor. Reed, however, uses the detective story to expose the limitations of Western metaphysics. He wants the reader to know that the traditional detective story is not innocent, that it is a construct, and that it endorses Western metaphysics. In classic form the detective novel requires a concept of time and history in which past events can be frozen in order to reconstruct those events into a teleological (natural phenomena) driven narrative thread leading from a mystery – laden crime to a resolution.

Reed envisions the multi-culture as a sort of collective consciousness to be created through cultural exchanges between individuals and groups which are revitalise not only their individual experiences but their culture as well. His kaleidoscopic surveys of history, art, and religion in his literature are based on the general conviction that a diversity of realities is more of an asset than a liability in furthering self-understanding as well as tolerance of the family of men. But more specifically, those surveys are organised made by ethnic groups within the United States to the country as a whole, contributors which Reed feels have not been given the recognitions they deserve by the majority of the American populace past or present.

## CONCLUSION

As an African American writer, one of his literary objectives is to present the cultural heritage of African Americans as a rich combination of traditions and influences which in turn have contributed than is traditionally recognized. But his literature also documents Asian and Indian Americans whose cultural inheritances have been largely overshadowed by the

European value system prevailing in the United States. To sum up, yet in these novels, throughout this paper, I have analysed that Reed was offering what can be called a postmodern analysis of the United States as a nation, by bringing to light the shaky foundations of the integrity. Through an analysis of the way point of view and time shape character development within the framework of the relationship posed that the novel's structural integrity as well as its quite formidable dimension as social commentary. Reed's novels focus most on social circumstances which inhibit the development of Blacks in American society and this chapter also analysed the characteristics of hoodoo detective in Reed's novels.

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## Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child*: A Revolutionary Sprout versus Colonial Phantom

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African literature is politically committed. Some of the African writers have been very much influenced by politics. Most of the African writer's revolt against colonial rule resentment is at racial discrimination. The colonial rulers and their slave trade inspired African novelists. Colonialism and slavery are the important themes in the novels in these days. Like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi was attracted by it very much. He is the first person who touched colonial subject in Kenya with his first novel.

*Weep Not, Child* is Ngugi's semi autobiographical novel and an account of his childhood during the Mau Mau period (1952–57). His attention is shifted more towards the problems of alienation of land and the Mau Mau rebellion which marks the beginning of the freedom movement in East Africa. It has been hailed as the “first East African novel in English, and the first to deal with the Mau Mau guerrilla war of the 1950s from an African point of view” (Harry Blamires, 1983: 198). Ngugi conforms in an interview with Dennis Duerden that the relationships between people are destroyed by the war. He says, “Actually in the novel I have tried to show the effect of the Mau Mau war on the ordinary man and woman who were left in the villages. I think the terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was the distraction of family life, the distraction of personal relationship” (Dennis Duerden, 1972:121).

*Weep Not, Child* depicts about the people who were under colonial government during Mau Mau war, when nationalist sentiments have spread to Kenya. Ngugi gives a description of the power of the white rulers, the resentment of the Africans at being enslaved in their own land and their attempt to rise up against the tyranny. The revolutionary acts or colonial attack which has won in the final is the main story in the novel. Since the government is under the control of the white people, they finally won success but indirectly the local black people have won because they started revolution against the colonialism which later took a great shape and sent the foreigners to

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their country. The events focus on the Mau Mau emergency and also on the lives of the family of Ngotho and the family of Howlands a white settler farmer and Jacobo, a Kenyan landowner. The reality is shown in every event that happened in author's life.

In the beginning of the novel, Njoroge, a young boy with black skin, is offered to go to school. Indeed it is a real opportunity for him, because he is the first one in his family who is able to go to school. After twelve years, he is denied the education by which he has sought to fulfill himself and enrich the life of his family and his country; he tries to take his life. Ngotho, Njoroge's father and head of the family, usually tells some inspiring and exciting stories. Ngotho tells a very fascinating story that the land, which is now owned by the landlords, originally belonged to their ancestors. One day a big strike is announced that should bring higher wages for the black workers. Ngotho joins the gathering. Suddenly Jacobo, a black land owner, appears and tries to persuade the blacks to end their strike. Unfortunately Ngotho attacks Jacobo. The result is a big commotion, where two people get killed. However Jacobo survives and swears revenge.

Njoroge is taken to prison and he is released after a few days. He comes to know that his father protects his eldest son Boro, who has committed the murder. Boro's decision to join Mau Mau is a result of the realization of the importance of black people. Colonial situations are seen in this novel including revolution against the white people. One week later Ngotho dies. Boro, Njoroge's brother and also leader of the Mau Mau, kills Mr Howlands, who is another important landlord of the village. Therefore he is put into prison and later on he is executed. Another brother of Njoroge called Kamau has also been imprisoned for lifetime. Finally Njoroge stay with his two mothers. He attempts suicide but he is saved by his mother. So he finally wants to leave the town, but his two mothers hold him back. Finally he thinks that he is a coward, because he can not change the social system. Brendon says "The conclusion of the novel is ambivalent" (Brendon Nicholls, 2005: 96). Palmer has mentioned "One can not make great claims for *Weep Not, Child*. Nevertheless, it is an important work which within narrow limits has been modestly successful" (Eustace Palmer, 1972: 10).

The novel is divided into two parts and eighteen chapters. The first Part "The Waning Light" deals with the education of Njoroge, the central character in the novel. The second part "Darkness Falls" deals with the rising revolution in Kenya. In this novel, the total action is set in Kenya, which is also the home country of Ngugi. The main themes of the book are the importance of education and the rising revolutionary ideas in countries, which are dominated by colonialists. The two parts in the novel "chronicle the destructiveness of colonial penetration in the central Highlands" (Lionel Cliffe, 1977: 22).

## II

Ngotho, the head of the family, lives in Mahua village with his two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi and his four sons Boro, Kori, Kamau and Njoroge. His fifth son, Mwangi,

has been killed during the Second World War while fighting in the war. We come to know in the first chapter that Ngotho's home "was well known for being a place of peace" (11) but now there is a lot of enthusiasm in the family because the youngest son, Njoroge, is about to go to school, the first boy in the family to do so.

Njoroge is most excited when her mother asks him whether he likes to go to school. "O, mother!" Njoroge gasped. He half feared that the woman might withdraw her words" (3). His mother, Nyokabi, feels very proud of her son because he is the first person from their family who is going to school and she hopes that she gets good enhancement of her status in the society. Her ambition is to say that her son is well educated. Ngotho, his father, also takes pride in the matter of his son who is about to attend school.

Kamau, Njoroge's half-brother, gets training as a carpenter. He thinks that education is very important thing for future prosperity. Kamau is apprenticed to Nganga, a village carpenter and a rich man. Nganga has land. Njoroge likes stories very much. Ngotho, Njoroge's father, usually tells stories in his *Thingira* in the evening. Such story-telling is a part of the traditional Gikuyu way of educating their children. Ngotho tells a story which refers to the coming of the white man to their country and the misappropriation of their land which was originally belonged to the Black people.

Ngotho works under Mr Howlands who is a product of the First World War. Ngotho joins in a strike that should bring higher wages for the black workers. Kiarie speaks in the strike that "All the land belonged to the people-black people. They had been given it by God. For every race had their country. The Indians had India. Europeans had Europe. And Africans had Africa, the land of the black people (57). He reminds the crowd of people of their history under colonialism, of their alienation from the land. He is confident of getting more money for their work. In the meeting, the applause gathers strength, Kiarie's re-telling of history continues. He tells of the Africans who have been taken to fight Hitler. He tells of a man named Jomo, the Black Moses. He pleads that Africans must rise and shout: "The time has come. Let my People go. Let my People go! We want back our land! Now!" (58). The government declares a state of emergency to force obedience from the people. Ngotho is labelled a Mau Mau leader and his family placed under close observation. Njeri and Kori are arrested in their compound for breaking the curfew law. Njeri is released when the money is paid. Kori is sent instead to a detention camp without trial. Ngotho is arrested confessing to a murder that actually he did not commit. He is tortured. At the same moment, many people are arrested in their homes and accused as Mau Mau terrorists.

Mr Howlands takes charge as District Officer. He tortures Njoroge to tell where Boro has escaped. Boro becomes the leader in Mau Mau. After a few days Ngotho is released from prison. He is too old and tortured by the police. Actually Ngotho has not killed Jacobo. It is Boro who has killed Jacobo and again he has gone to forest. Ngotho tells Njoroge "Did I kill Jacobo? Did I shoot him? I don't know. A man doesn't know when he kills" (123). When Boro returns, Ngotho has already died. Boro kills Mr Howlands. When Mr Howland is going to be killed, he says that the Kenyan land is his

own. Boro, a revolutionary and radical is put in prison and later on he is executed. Another brother of Njoroge called Kamau, a carpenter has also been imprisoned for lifetime. Only Njoroge and his two mothers remain free. The novel ends on a dispondent note.

Besides the revolutionary story in the novel, there is a love story between Njoroge, son of Ngotho and Mwihaki, the younger daughter of Jacobo. In the beginning of the novel, Njoroge studies with Mwihaki. Njoroge and Mwihaki's homes are near each other. Njoroge likes her very much and thinks that she is a good companion to him in the school. Mwihaki feels more secure with him than she feels with her brothers who don't care much about her. After the results, Mwihaki joins boarding school for girls. Njoroge is in Siriana Secondary School which is five miles away from home. In the ending of the novel, when he meets Mwihaki and keeps a proposal before her that he loves her. If she agrees it, he wants to marry her and also he does not want to live in the village. She does not accept it. The novel ends on a deeply gloomy note that he is the guilty man who has avoided his responsibility for which he has prepared himself since childhood. He thinks that he is a coward. 'Yes,' he whispered to himself. 'I am a coward' (136).

### III

The novel describes many points like politics, Mau Mau independence war, education, Christianity and cultural themes. Ngugi's characterization of the people involved is quite interesting. Some characters are connected with the Mau Mau, not because of high-minded ideals but because of personal grievances with others. The white characters are, like Mr Howlands and Jacobo, considered outsiders by the Gikuyu but consider them Africans.

Njoroge is the central character in the novel. Njoroge is an alienated protagonist and he is a passive observer. He is socially isolated from his family and a symbol of victim. Ngugi has identified himself with Njoroge. One can easily draw the conclusion that "Njoroge represents Ngugi himself" (Ime Ikiddeh, 1975: 210). We see Njoroge from childhood to adulthood. Ime Ikiddeh says that "*Weep Not, Child* lies in a child-hero who is at the same time an innocent" (Ime Ikiddeh 1969: 6). Njoroge's story is the story of many Kenyan youth during colonial period. He feels that the Western education has made him a coward and an old man at the age of twenty. He always depends on dreams but he does not know how to react when the difficult problems arise. When the teacher is murdered by colonial troops, he gets fear. His fear and his dream also die. His fear has given the way to Howlands for torture him. He is neither a revolutionary nor dare person. In every country and every village, we can see people like Njoroge who will fear of society. He does not understand what to do at the end of the novel.

The other main character is Ngotho, father of Njoroge. Ngotho, 'a truly tragic figure' (Eustace Palmer, 1972: 3), is the head of the family and respected by his family members and the villagers. Ngugi has given the significance to this character in chapter three where Ngotho communicates his deep, almost sacred love for the land. Ngotho tells



a story to the children. He is confident that the prophecy of the Gikuyu sage, Mugo wa Kibiro, that the land will be returned to its rightful owners. He confides that his father also believed in the prophecy. When he is asked why he is working for white man, he does not have answer with him. As a victim of colonialism, he is unable to revolt against the white people though he knows the future that the white men would rob the local people. He continues to work in the land for Howlands. Since Ngotho is a coward, he does not attend the revolutionary meetings but finally he attends a meeting which is organized by Boro, Kori and others. Though he has a dare person internally, he is afraid of the white people. Finally Ngotho dies with pains.

The third important character in the novel is Boro. The character of Boro illustrates the stresses of adjusting to life in colonial Kenya and the losses and traumas of being in active service in a major war. He is very calm and silent person with many different and revolutionary ideas. He is the only real revolutionary sprout in the novel. He opposes the white people domination in their country. Boro goes to Second World War to fight for the white people. He can not forget the death of his step brother Mwangi. Boro can't understand for what and for who Mwangi has died. When war comes to end, he returns to village but there he finds that their land has been occupied by the white people. He expresses his anger on his father because he does not like his father to work as a labourer in their own land. Boro can't understand why the white man is allowed to take over the land without meeting any resistance. He knows well that the real reason for his journey to the forest is need to fight for freedom. But he kept it aside. His mission becomes a mission of revenge. If he kills a single white man, he will exact a vengeance for brother killed. By Boro's character, Ngugi pointed if people have revenged the white people in the beginning, they might have got the real independence. Finally Boro joins the Mau Mau freedom fighters. Boro "bruised in mind," (C.R. Visweswara Rao, 1993: 91) anatomizes the harvest dimensions of the Mau Mau struggle. Boro kills Jacobo and he says that "He betrayed black people. Together, you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women. And finally you killed my father" (128).

Jacobo is the fourth representative figure in the novel. He is a wicked person and he is a terror in the land and he is a loyalist collaborator. Jacobo is a "lackey of his white settlers" (David Cook, 1983: 57). He represents the small number of Africans who are allowed to own and farm land, who are thus able to accumulate wealth. The white people show their kindness on them and Jacobo is made like that and he becomes their flatterer. Such people become agents of division within the African community.

Mr Howlands, who represents the white settlers for whom the land has been misappropriated, is tall, heavily built, and with an oval shaped face that ends in a double chin and a big stomach. "He is a typical Kenyan settler" (30). His wife, Suzannah, is a good lady but she feels very bored in Africa and she knows that Africa means hardship and complete break with Europe which is her mother country. Like Ngotho, Howlands has also lost his elder son, Peter in the war. He has another son Stephen, who meets Njoroge in Siriana. Mr Howlands has come to Kenya after the First World War. "After years of security at home, he had been suddenly called to arms and he had gone to the war with the fire of youth that imagines war a glory. But after four years of blood and

terrible destruction, like many other young men he was utterly disillusioned by the “peace” (30).

Mwihaki is the most ambivalent of the female figures in the novel. We see her from childhood to adolescence. Ngugi has kept the scope limited and her characterization is not fully developed. Her father is a member of the landed class that is complicit with colonial capitalist domination. At a Christmas meal at her house, she admonishes Njoroge for laughing during grace, saying that she has raised her children “to value *ustaarabu*” unlike children from “primitive homes” (18-19). She loves Njoroge but Ngugi does not focus on their love too much. Njoroge wishes Mwihaki were his sister and he comes to view their relation as a filial one.

Besides Mwihaki, the other female characters in the novel are Nyokabi and Njeri, the wives of Ngotho, like each other and they are not controversial characters. Nyokabi is Njoroji’s mother and Njeri is his step mother. Nyokabi and Njeri mean “the devoted” (Herta Meyer, 1991: 30). In Jennifer Evans’ view about them is “Njoroge’s two mothers (and Ngugi’s female characters more generally) are all in their own ways ‘resistance heroines’ and the strongest symbols of cultural identity, community and continuity that these novels have to offer” (Jennifer Evans, 1987: 131). So we can say that most of the characters are suppressed and protest against the white men actions indirectly, except Boro but finally they could not get success with their illiteracy and also literacy.

#### IV

*Weep Not, Child* deals with the political theme of Kenyan national movement. Ngugi locates his novels at a very crucial phase in the history of colonial Kenya. Most of the Gikuyu population and local people are forced to leave their land by the white colonialists. Ngugi has used the historical event Mau Mau in his other novels also. He says in an interview “Mau Mau is the most important event in Kenyan history, even in African history. Mau Mau war, which started in 1952, was the first armed struggle in the colony of Britain. Remember that, unlike other liberation wars that happened afterwards, the Mau Mau didn’t have any basis outside Kenya because all they got, they made themselves. In terms of sheer impact on British colonialism, it was immense. That is why it’s so prominent in my works” (Henry Akuburio, 2006). Mau Mau is seen as an important subject in this novel. Ngugi in another interview says “The Mau Mau war in Kenya is a very important factor in the creation of the present individuals in Kenya. It was a very formative factor in nation building” (Dennis Duerden, 1972: 124).

Political conflict is the most important thing in this novel. It can be seen that this novel is set at the colonial times; this is when the British are ruling over Africa. Ngotho and his father have participated in World War for the white people. But when they return from there, their land has been occupied by the white people. “My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands. He died lonely, a poor man waiting for the white man to go” (25). African people do not like the British ruling there, and taking over their lands. Many black people have lost their loved ones in the war that they have fought for the British; this was one of the main reasons as to why Africans are so upset. The

blacks think that white people have land in their own country and they have left their country to come and rob the black people country. The black people want their land back. The blacks develop hatred towards the whites, and this is one of the most intense events of the novel. In middle of the novel, we come to know that there is a strike that is going to be conducted by the blacks. The power is under controlled by the whites in black people country. This incident is the turning point of the story because the political conflicts get stronger. With the political power, the whites have tortured the blacks immensely; this is seen through the family of Njoroge. Hence it is seen that political conflicts make up the basis of the plot.

In African culture the land is the most important thing to them, it is also revealed that God has given the land to them, and they must retrieve it from the Whites, who have forcefully occupied their land. Ngotho says “It is the best land in the country” (32). Both Mr Howlands and Ngotho tell that they give more importance to the land. In many novels, Ngugi has pointed that land provides food for the Gikuyu people and that is why everybody in the country likes land. The land will connect the people. Ngotho and Mr Howlands are suffered a deprivation caused by war. The land brings them together. Ime Ikiddeh agree with Ngugi and points that “Historically, land is the source of man’s life, the basis of any social community and the foundation of all human culture, remained the sensitive factor in connection between Africans and Europeans in Kenya” (Ime Ikiddeh, 1975: 210).

Boro, the angry man, brings the revolution against the colonilism. His resentment and antipathy leads him to join the Mau Mau freedom fighters. They begin as the political resistance to fight the terror of government which is viciousness against them. The protest comes from Boro but not from the Njoroge or other characters. The fight is for their land and rights but Boro including some other revolutionaries unnecessarily arrested and tortured by the colonial phantoms. Revolutionary sprout will always win in the end. Though Njoroge does not participate in war or fight against, finally he understands that something would surely change in the future. Mwihaki says that they have to do some work in the village that is revolutionary acts against the Britishers who tortured them. Ngugi indirectly says that the local people must oppose the white people in their country.

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## DECLARATION FORM

3rd June, 2010  
Warangal

To  
**The Editor**  
**The CRITERION**

From  
Ramesh Babu A  
Research Scholar  
Kakatiya University  
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Sir,

**Sub:** Sending an article entitled “**Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Weep Not Child: A Revolutionary Sprout versus Colonial Phantom**”- Please go through it- Declaration of claiming originality-Reg.

I, A. Ramesh Babu, wish to declare that the article entitled “**Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Weep Not Child: A Revolutionary Sprout versus Colonial Phantom**” is an original work done by me and that it has not been published in any Journal or sent for publication. I hereby give an undertaking that incase of any dispute regarding the authenticity of the published article. I indemnify the editors and that I take the full responsibility in this regard.



Yours faithfully,

A. Ramesh Babu  
Phone: 99590 26160

*Chuck Taylor*  
*Texas, USA*

Clouds

So I say if they give you lemons that taste like nails  
then go ahead and make them battery acid

So I say if they pave over those trees you so dearly  
loved, that dense forest of hardwoods that ran

along the flood plain of Wolf Pen Creek, to build  
a line of the most commonplace of chain

corporate eateries that drove out of business most of  
the local establishments, then I say this time don't

make battery acid, don't give yourself an ulcer  
or disfigure anyone's face. Go out and stare

at the clouds, they haven't found a way to market  
the clouds yet, no one as yet claims mineral

rights or owns the deeds to clouds. So I say watch  
the common clouds, watch them drift across the

sagacious empty blue of sky, using a tree perhaps  
as your reference point, and watch the way

the clouds shape-shift, how they build cathedrals  
up into the air and then break them silently

down right in the soft miles before your eyes,  
watch till time grows timeless and the sun

begins to set and you see how the rosy fingers of  
the sun illuminate the clouds at first, but

then the color shifts, taking on bands of purple  
or yellow tone, and then the sun sets further

and its light just clips the lower bumps of clouds,  
making them a pinkish orange, while the

rest of the clouds grow dark. Your soul is like  
those clouds. Luminous and light your soul

shape-shifts through the sky of your body, building  
splendid architectures, taking on such holy  
colors. Timeless are the clouds of your unknowing  
where the worries of naming lemon words  
break like a mirror dropped on a floor and your  
humble rosy heart drifts in a living peace  
on its royal road to falling snow or blessing rain. That's  
you, you know, sliding so easy from life to life

*L Douglas St Ours*  
*Baltimore, USA*

MILLION MILE SKY

From under the trees  
of the shady east  
I'm heading for  
the truer west  
still I'm waiting  
at a crossing  
so  
on the road  
and  
off the tracks  
as an engine  
pulling freight  
splits the scene  
each car  
a passing blur  
like frames  
on an  
unspooling film  
reminding me  
I got to get  
to where  
a thousand  
yard train  
is just a  
two inch line across  
a hundred mile desert  
under a million mile sky.



*Written by Dr. Katti Padma Rao*  
*Translated by Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu*

## THE PRESENT IS BLIND

The Eye is a machine of printing  
All the printed things are not personal

The four grapes of the tree fell down  
But the beauty lies in the tree itself

The juice suckers are defeated  
Though their hands are wet  
Their throat is still dry

The tamarind tree completely dried  
When it is filled with tender leaves and flowers  
It seems to be a queen with a crown

The village is like a ripe land  
When there was a flow of stream  
But now it remained a cow of no use

The living being stretched its hand  
On the death bed  
Without sense by that time

Then the clouds rained  
But not a single drop of water  
It rained only the stories

The remainders are the marks on the eyelids  
The present alone is blind in History

*Ravi Naicker*

## WINDOW ON THE WORLD

The rays of the African sun  
Penetrate the boughs of withering branches.  
Sheep mow the golden, crunchy grass  
While crows salvage morsels  
From earth's marooned ship.

The stately home to a pioneer family  
Perched on the hill,  
Nestled amongst blue cliffs  
Overlooking green sugar fields  
And countless rows of gum trees.

"Bavie, Kalay,  
This was our ancestral home", says Kovie...  
A melting pot of architecture,  
Home to the affluent and the mendicant.

Adorned with artefacts from East and West.  
Noted for comfort, peace and tranquility.  
Exquisite wall murals, antiques and the mantelpiece.  
The chandeliers, aquarium and green house.

Cascades meandering through green landscapes.  
The designer/farmer multi-talented.  
And lo; behold darkness envelopes Glen Albyn Farm.  
The divine lamp of heaven emerges graciously.

Memories, memories to savour of a family that once lived here.

In a cloud of dust the German sedan (Kovs -1ZN) takes to the road.

*William Crawford*  
*Philadelphia, USA*

Country Bluebird Reimagined

she cradles a bluebird  
in the palm of her  
right hand,  
hidden

she feels no need to  
show it to you

to tell you  
about the warmth  
of its tiny belly

the way it rises and collapses  
against her palm

it's an honest heartbeat,  
an honest breath,  
quickened by  
the fear of human stain

simply an evergreen truth,  
a sacred bond, unbroken

a poem that writes/rites/rights itself

if you could see her eyes  
at this moment  
you would understand  
the soft surprise  
of this sudden warmth

the way they see  
far beyond  
all of this  
even while closing

if you could see her eyes  
at this moment  
you would understand

that the secret of flight  
is revealed in life

in the light  
she can only be  
the source of

how else  
could it weave  
itself in and out of her  
in the way that it does?  
such a graceful lacing

how else  
could it walk  
both beside her  
and inside of her  
yet never falter,  
never fade?

far beyond the bitter green hiss  
of heat and frustration,  
of small animal  
caught in the canebrakes,  
left for dead

where the music is always  
composed in minor key  
and the wind whips  
up a familiar threnody  
low and lonesome

there's an altar,  
a limestone cathedral,  
a tower and a bell ringing  
urgent, wide open emergency

a plangent plea  
for peace  
in the valley  
of her mind

still verdant,  
still pure,  
even in the slatternly

shadows of these spires

you see  
it was always  
her eyes  
first

they told a story  
even at half-moon

they elucidated  
the secret of flight  
same as life

spoke volumes  
of the energy  
in a bird's wing  
when released

they held you  
reflected you  
when you were  
at your most fragile

treasuring the touch  
which, let's face it,  
still is the purpose,  
the point

never a word of dying  
for she knows  
it says nothing at all

of this bird  
blue but unbroken  
in the palm  
of her hand  
rising

without the  
crushing weight  
of surrender  
or farewell.

*Melissa Studdard*  
*Houston, USA*

Maverick

Galloping girl,  
beautiful woman in bloom—  
you ride this life  
like you would an untamed beast,  
your hands on the mane  
as if clinging to sanity itself,  
your own hair blowing  
its susurrus,  
whispers of fire in the wind.  
But sanity  
you suspect  
is only an opinion,  
and genius is the simple act  
of holding steady  
on the back  
of the bucking beast.  
New ideas, you know,  
can chafe just as fierce  
as brand new boots,  
but you will break them in  
just as surely  
as you will break this wild horse  
into a stride.  
Let your toes  
dangle where they will  
as you splash  
through the mire,  
though the magic,  
through the miracle  
of this half bloomed hour.  
So what  
if one foot grazes  
the persistent weeds of delirium  
while the other  
reaches and dips  
through crystal pools of clarity?  
You're still astride,  
still on top,  
still above

and firmly planted  
on the back of genius.  
Your chin, I can see,  
is lifted  
in raucous prayer  
to the star splashed sky,  
it is lifted  
in that nascent,  
perennial  
plea of adolescence:  
*Let me live, experience, grow!*  
Just know, Corin,  
(let it sink into the wisdom  
of your bones)  
that with your brilliant  
bareback ride  
and with all subsequent  
incantations  
lies the power and the charge  
to wake this dormant world  
and create  
and recreate it  
continually  
anew.

*Alacrity Stone*  
*Toronto, Canada*

My Love Trusts

In the treasury of snow  
angelic hands in shadow fold  
each fragile breath of a rose  
with reverence to a name.  
Vibrant sister who stepped  
a silent samba in somber shoes;  
whose flutter of exquisite hands  
dropped like doves to nest  
in awkward fists of gentleness;  
you are "a fountain of gardens  
a well of living water and  
streams from lebanon."

Winter left us with a kiss  
a dew dressed and trembling blossom  
pink at dawn's first glimpse  
through myriad spheres of silver mist.  
But the flow of folds concealed  
the first flower's fatal seed  
and beneath each moment's dress  
the days yearned to weakness.  
Bereft because I've loved  
substance more and light less  
mine is the bleak scripture of trees  
against a field of drifting snow.

Unseen, the faithful work of hands,  
in living stone, replaces sand  
with reverence to a name.  
No vehement beat of flames  
or swells can singe or shake  
this place where light dwells;  
where love believes, hopes,  
endures, suffers and forgives all  
and never fails. A treasure immune  
to moth and rust, beyond  
brute reach of beautiful dust;  
deeper than death, my love trusts.



In the treasury of snow  
angelic hands in shadow fold  
each fragrant breath of a rose  
with reverence to a name.

*Donna Baier Stein*  
*New Jersey, USA*

Two Beloved Poems

1

I touch my Beloved warily today.  
It has been so long since I felt him.  
I don't know which one of us is to blame.  
I failed to sit; he/SHE failed to approach.  
What kind of god is this?  
We both let things slide,  
and wariness is uncomfortable  
for both of us, I imagine.

2

Behind sorrow lies anger.  
Why didn't you come for me, Beloved?  
Why didn't you wrap me in Michael's red cape,  
Swing his sword at those who refused me?  
Why leave me to my own devices  
When yours are so much better?  
Following your plans makes us both feel good.  
On my own, I stumble repeatedly.

*Brian Heffron*  
*Los Angeles, USA*

Losing the Girls

I abhorred the idea of losing the girls,  
the only things I got before my sister  
(She didn't talk to me for a month.)

But now some days are stones  
I just cannot carry,  
brutal boulders beyond my grasp;

I was reared to be tough,  
but some days all I do is cry  
over this enemy too large  
and within my own breast.

Where could I forge a weapon  
to defend myself against soft tissue?  
It was as if a burglar had snuck inside  
to steal me from my own life,  
had come in the sinister night  
and burgled me of my girls, my friends, myself.

But deep in the red flesh of my heart  
there remains a camp of hope  
where horses circle a small, relentless fire  
and all my loved ones, past and present,  
sit around these flames,  
the love for me in their eyes  
illuminating this camp like a torch.

*Khurshid Alam*

### Blurring Borders

I want to sneak into some books  
in the form of words, running in  
pages upon pages – volumes after volumes.

They say I'm an animal of my society  
I speak a language, I profess a culture  
and I'm a forte of my psyche – I'm Balkanized from all sides.

But my psyche has made me a psycho, I say  
I can speak many languages, I can even  
exchange ideas through gestures  
Many cultures have culminated into me, I boast.

I wear a tie among the people who put on  
loincloth – *dhoti* and *lungi*  
and *kurta-pyjama* when I'm among the Westerners  
I'm an Anglophile, yet I cram many outlandish words  
into English in imitation of some Gaelic, Irish, and other writers  
whose works have appeared in *Granta* and TLS-like magazines  
which have taken the readers to the world of wonder  
cracking the meaning of outlandish words and phrases –  
and they have impressed the readers much.

*Darryl Salach  
Toronto, Canada*

## BREAKING DIGITAL LOCKS

government crackdowns:

the Feds introduce a new bill  
entitled "Technology Neutral"

pop-goes-the-weasel  
screams the Industry Minister standing  
on the left and sometimes on the right

copyright protection  
now has more teeth – bite the ass  
of the individual consumer  
delights the war-monger pimp  
who  
proposes further annihilation  
to the arts

delighted corporate millionaires  
rejoice with cocktails  
on Lear jets  
cradling "GOO-GOO–GAA-GAA" dolls  
that stain their conscience  
like new-found bullion.

*Ian Prattis*  
*Ottawa, Canada*

Poet

Behind a plough of words  
the poet drives a furrow,  
- never straight.

Phrases spiral upwards,  
as an eagle soars in a sky  
with no horizon or meter.

Universal alphabet mimics dancing clouds  
and touches Creation's syntax.  
Cascading into passages that hover,  
tracing cosmic runes  
at the edge of knowing.

Words drift by on the morning mist.  
A whisper of wind,  
That haunts every thought  
I breathe.

The Muse -

waiting wondrous so long,  
for cracks in façade's order to crumble.  
Then she grants life to a poem.

## Snapshot

*Mitanjeli Tischler*  
*Kansas, USA*

### The Separation

Everything is arranged. The lights are on, and the groceries sit on the counter. The coffee pot is clean, the tea boxes stacked on the shelf. Yellow peppers and green bananas remain in their plastic bags on the floor. The man and the woman argue at the front door, and the old lady who never wears shoes glares at their noise from the end of the hallway. The tones become harsher and the words more honest. The woman begins to cry, and she feels the doorknob now slippery in her hand. The man leaves. The woman stands on the welcome mat. The open door bounces off her arm and back with each sob. The woman goes to the living room. The peppers stay on the floor as she calls her sister on the phone, as the man yells into his steering wheel in the parking garage.

### The Woman's To-Do List

Bank, pick up photos, oil change (use coupon on fridge), farmers market, send contract to client and arrange next meeting, bake brownies for Bible study, read for class and write analysis, finish thank-you letters.

### The Woman's Sermon Notes

Things are to be used. People are to be loved. The reversal of this is always immoral.

Our lives are often laboriously intertwined with another we have neither chosen nor fully accepted. New beginnings are needed. New beginnings are possible.

### The Woman's Favorite Memory

The perfect air in the backyard – the dark sky and the small patio lights – he switched the song to one they both loved – this was the first time they listened to it together – the air was perfect in the backyard – the swimming pool sat still (so did the trees) – he held his hand out and asked if she would dance – she grinned and could not stop – they were the only two in the backyard – that square of cement was clean and warm – the air was perfect – the only sound was the song – she waited as long as possible to pull him closer and close her eyes – as long as she could stand it – and the air was perfect in the backyard – still and warm – they were the only people there – nothing else moved – nothing else made a sound – the song was perfect in the backyard. Three years later they danced to it again – the woman wore a white dress and her father sat still across the room.

### The Woman's Journal

Even if he solves the problems and heals the wounds and answers my questions (even if Dad decides to have a conversation with him), I will still question everything, and then answer myself until I decide to stay. Even if we do get the apartment – even if he steps up to all of this – I'm sure I'll find an excuse to be rid of his unconditional love.



## The Letter in the Man's Pocket

I am waiting for you to get home, and I'm thinking about the past few weeks. They've been fantastic and have reminded me just why I'm so in love with you. I told you not to open this until some day when I'm gone for the night and you miss me, but you're probably in the next room reading it quickly. Maybe not. Maybe you're sitting on the bed and wishing I was next to you. Either way, I want you to know that I love you, and I wouldn't trade our hectic, stressful, wonderful relationship for anything in the whole world. As we enter this next phase, I am both excited and nervous for what it holds. I've come to accept that I'll never be a different man, but I can always strive to be a better one. You are the love of my life. I'm ready to fight for you once again, and I'm in this for the long haul.

P.S. Thank you for everything.

## The Cookie Man

An. Ray Norsworthy  
Boise, USA

Because the sun kills the improvident, and the cookie man is nothing if not provident, he always comes into town about an hour before dusk, his elongated shadow preceding him down Main Street. The only sound is the wind whistling the day's last fevered breath. No dog scampers out to meet him and bark; no birds fluster and take flight. The dogs have all been eaten, every last Poodle, Pomeranian, Shih Tzu, & Lab, along with every other animal that could be hunted down. Except for a few crows and vultures, all the birds have fallen from the sky, littering the ground with wings and feathers of every size and color. There are still rats and mice, but their numbers finally seem to be dwindling. I feel more like an oversized rodent now than a human being, although I used to be the mayor of this charming little town called Quail Springs. Now I am just one of seventeen surviving residents who hide among the ruins in our choice of half-fallen and abandoned buildings, waiting for the cookie man.

The cookie man knows we are here and that we are his friends. His path from the crumbled outskirts down Main and then Pine Street to the city park is well trodden, some of the debris cleared away during early days after the disaster. Back then, when the word *hope* still had meaning, some of us even buried the dead if we knew them or if they were in the way. Many buildings and vehicles had to be sealed up like tombs. When the cookie man reaches the designated picnic table underneath a massive dead

maple, trunk stripped of bark, limbs white as bone, he unloads the cookies from his backpack. After we went into hiding four months ago, we began leaving him personal objects belonging to different ones of us every day. It began almost by accident, with modest intent. Our idea was simply to remind him of our gratitude and that we are still fully human and once led normal lives. At first it was mostly photographs of some family member or important event, a newspaper clipping, a keepsake with sentimental value, a favorite dish or antique saved from the devastation. But as time went by and some of us became more and more desperate for any form of beggarly salvation, the objects of reassurance and curiosity became like offerings to a god. Collected valuables of all kinds dispensed piecemeal, left with a photograph and sometimes an attempt at a personal note so the bestower would be identified. Diamonds or precious jewels that had obviously been embedded in a piece of jewelry, gold and silver coins, even stacks of money. To my great surprise (and everyone else's, I believe), he never took anything with him, yet he always took the time to look each object over with the eye of a grateful appraiser. After Mrs. Hufnagel, who owned a jewelry shop, left a small mound of glittering multi-carat diamonds, the cookie man left a note saying,

*Bribery will get you nowhere, since I have nothing to give you but these cookies. But thanks anyway; they are very pretty stones.*

When he leaves the park, his path is by necessity less direct. Between rusted burned-out automobiles, over dunes of trash-littered sand banked against concrete slabs and piles of rubble, under the lightless signal light swinging at the intersection of Pine and Les Bois Avenue, he moves without hurry, in a shambling gait, not looking around, not even up or down, until he passes the school bus full of shriveled child-sized corpses—there he always bows his head until he turns the corner on Cherry Street.

When I could still hobble around like Quasimodo, I would weave my way through the debris and the dead, up the steps at Town Hall to the clock tower so I could watch him appear on the horizon and leave the same way, almost walking in his own footsteps as the dusk closed in around him. My friend Erwin asked me why I did it, why I expended all that energy to watch a man slouch across an empty wasteland the same way every day and with the same meaningless purpose. I told him every act has as much meaning as we give it. Not long after that conversation, I was with Erwin when he died. His last words were, —This means nothing. I didn't feel like arguing with him.

When I first laid eyes on the cookie man it was on the shore of Lake Edie almost a year ago and at that time I was not timid about him laying eyes on me or my fellow travelers. Five of us had ventured out of town on the old highway to Kishagowah with the intention of crossing the desert, then the mountains, traveling all the way to the coast if need be. We stopped at the lake for water and to rest in the shade of the cliffs. We had gone less than five miles and were already exhausted and weak. The stranger waved and called out from somewhere up in the rocks. Micki looked up, waved, and yelled hello. The rest of us were too startled. He scrambled down the cliffside, but approached with caution, although the closer he came, the more he realized he had little to fear. We were slightly more alarmed. He was covered with desert from head to foot, but the grit and grime could not disguise his tall, broad-shouldered physique. His clothes may have needed laundering (as did all of ours), but the pullover shirt and khaki cargo pants looked new, perhaps salvaged from a store. A wide-brim canvas hat was pulled down low, but his long, wavy brown hair hung lower. Like an old-time Native American, he wore moccasins with no socks. On prominent display was a large pistol

snugged under an Army belt. A canteen of water and a sheathed hunting knife were clipped to the same belt. He wore the same backpack he now carries the cookies in. The most startling aspects of his appearance were his lightly tanned, undamaged skin, and his seemingly superhuman health and vitality, as if he'd been completely unaffected by the catastrophes that ended human civilization as we knew it.

He had just crossed the desert from the east. He said it was good to see some humans who still acted human. He had traveled at night when he could, and during the day he wore a reflective tunic like a high tech Bedouin. We were amazed that the traveler was real and not a figment of our wandering imaginations. He was just as amazed that we were attempting to travel east across the desert in the shape we were in. He persuaded us of the folly of such an attempt. It didn't take much persuasion.

— Until I crossed the mountains I hadn't seen the sun in six months, he said.  
— And the only people I saw I didn't want to see. Two of those generous pilgrims gave me this decoration. He lifted up his shirt. A jagged perpendicular scar, still red and swollen, ran down his chest as if he'd had open heart surgery with a chainsaw. —And another one did this. He took off his hat and turned. The top half of his right ear was missing. —I had to clean up his artwork with my knife. Hurt like hell. And a woman who traveled with me for a while went insane and almost flattened my head with a tree limb. I just had to run off and leave her.

The stranger didn't volunteer his name. Twice people asked and twice he changed the subject in a subtle way. —Call me whatever you like, he said, finally. —I've had temporary amnesia since I almost got my head caved in. I introduced myself and the others followed. —How many of you left?

—Not that many, Dan Rollins told him. —Few enough that I know all their names. Without being asked, docile Dan rattled them off. He had been a real estate salesman and had a good head for details. When he was through, the stranger asked if he was sure that was all the survivors. All five of us reassured him that it was as far as we knew. The man's whole body seemed to slump, as if just realizing how exhausted it was. He sat down on a nearby rock and hung his head.

Mary spoke up. She used her soothing voice. —I'm sorry. Were you trying to find someone?

Without looking up he just shook his head. —Way too late for that, he said.

If he was disheartened, so were we. Besides unwilling spirits our flesh was weak; Dan, Mary, and Al needed to recuperate before making the trek back to town. There was no way we could make it back to Quail Springs before nightfall. We shared some months old trail mix with the stranger and fanned ourselves in the shade. We could hardly believe our eyes when he dug a seine out of his backpack and waded into the shallow lake. He dragged out dozens of fish from the turbid water, some sickly looking and nearly dead, but several alive and flipping. With the dam breached and the river dried to a viscous trickle, Lake Edie was not really a lake anymore; just a spring that fed a pond the size of a cloud's shadow. He said most of the creatures left in the lake were bottom-dwelling fish, freshwater mussels, and a few snakes and turtles. I was surprised the lake water was able to sustain any life at all. It was surrounded by death. The national forestland surrounding the lake was a graveyard of trees that reached way beyond the horizon. The desert was in all directions and none of us knew where it ended. He offered us a dinner of fish ka-bobs and we eagerly accepted. Using

sharpened sticks for skewers, he alternated the pieces of fish with smaller pieces of mussels and cattails. It was the best meal we'd had in months. While we were eating he mentioned that his flashlight batteries had died, so we gave him some of ours. He seemed grateful. —I almost walked straight off that cliff last night, he said.

That night was spent in the large cave he discovered along the shore while out scouting around. The cooler air of the cave seemed like a luxury. Our host was polite but reserved. If at first I was startled by the fairness of his skin, I was equally startled by how terribly it blistered under the intense red sun that day. By the light of the campfire, he smeared cool mud on his face and arms. Mary, gaunt and jaundiced, yet still clinging to vestiges of her beauty and charm, laughed at his appearance, and he laughed with her when she handed him her mirror and he saw his reflection in the firelight. —What happened to your reflective tunic, she asked him. —Yesterday the wind borrowed it, he replied. —Maybe tomorrow she'll return it. The next morning Mary stayed behind when the other four adventurers dragged ourselves back to town, heads bowed not only from the sun, but in defeat and embarrassment after the previous morning's enthusiastic sendoff by the remaining townsfolk.

A week after that first meeting, when the two cave dwellers visited town, Mary told me the smearing of mud had become their morning ritual. —There is so much clay in the mud the slough is gradual over the course of the long day; it's like you're shedding your skin, she said. Once the sun was down, when the few stars still visible would twinkle dimly in the sky, the two of them would rinse each other off in the water. Then they would sit together in the cave's mouth and talk while the red moon rose. Because she was losing her long auburn hair he wove her a bonnet out of reeds. I

couldn't resist asking her his name. —I don't know; I call him Adam as a joke, she said. —He calls me Eve. Funny, huh? Some of the residents talked about trying to make the move out to the caves, but only Micki and I attempted it, about a month after the cookie man arrived. We made it more than halfway before the relentless oven-hot wind suddenly increased in savagery, blinding and choking us and stirring up so much dust a seed could have germinated in mid-air if I could have gathered enough saliva to spit. Micki, who I thought was in much better shape than I was, collapsed, and I had to carry her on my back the rest of the way. I became so disoriented and delirious it was a miracle I ever reached the lake. Yet somehow I did, and according to Mary, fell unconscious at their feet with Micki still wrapped around my back. When I awoke, Mary was dribbling shellfuls of water and some kind of soup down my throat. From the look in her eyes I knew before I even asked that Micki was dead. After I said goodbye to her, the cookie man dug a grave during that raging duststorm and buried her for me. Micki was my seventeen year old daughter.

By midsummer, Mary became too weak to walk, so the cookie man salvaged a wheelchair from the ruins of a nursing home in town. Her health deteriorated quickly and one day about six weeks later he showed up without her. When we looked in each other's eyes the question was asked and answered. His nod added an appoggiatura. On the knoll outside his cave there would now be two crosses of dead tree branches with names etched with limestone chalk. In the early fall, around the beginning of what should have been football season, the twenty-seven of us left decided by unanimous consent to stay out of sight during his visits. The horror in his face had become too obvious, although he did his best to hide it. A few times he even gagged when he



approached too near someone. Compared to us, a leper colony from long ago would seem like a health farm. We all made sure to avoid seeing any reflection; some of us were already having trouble remembering what we looked like before we became post-apocalyptic freaks. Our eyes were acutely sensitive to the light, anyway. I left a note for him on the table and weighed it down with the beetle-encased paperweight I'd been given by Li Chen, my Chinese interpreter. Since I had little use of my fingers, it took me most of the day to write. Despite the cookie man's clownish appearance, the mud smeared on his skin gives him an aboriginal air of menace. Sometimes he presses odd little bits and pieces into the mud coating his face: dried insects, translucent snake skins, mouse bones, shiny chips of quartz and obsidian, spaghetti-like streamers of yellowed newspaper. When he fixes his gaze on an object, the stark whiteness of his eyeballs leaps out from under the brim of the dirty brown hat. The cookies he leaves for us are not exactly Oreos. These cookies are made out of flour, a little clay for filler (abundant in the cliffs), salt, cattails, some vegetable shortening (from a five gallon bucket that he found in the ruins of Harry's Bar and Grill) , and whatever crawly or squiggly creatures he can find. Crawly, if on land, squiggly if in water. Mary gave him the idea and helped him get started. She knew we were all starving, having run out of food that could be harvested from the ruins. The first time he brought them it embarrassed him to hear our joyful cries and whispers of gratitude, as if we were giving thanks to a god. —After you taste them, you may want to make a big cookie out of me, he said. We knew the cookie man could not save us, but at least he gave us a filament of hope that we could stay alive long enough to...to what? We didn't know the answer to that question. It was an irrational hope, no doubt, but what hope isn't? As in the Chinese

proverb, the cookie man handed us a hollow reed so the ones drowning could breathe for a minute longer.

His ritual has seldom varied. The first day he came into town I followed him across the railroad tracks to the west side even though I hated exposing myself to the sun's burning red glare. His destination turned out to be 1809 S. Cherry Street (the address is still visible painted on the curb) where a spacious middle-class house once stood. All that was left were the front doorframe and the walls of a single large, rectangular room. I watched him clear enough debris to climb the porch steps and stand exhausted at the threshold, hesitating as if he were getting up the nerve to ring the doorbell or trying to remember where he left the key. He fanned his mud-clotted face with his hat and then shouldered aside the oak door that hung by a single hinge. After crawling over collapsed walls and debris, he reached the doorway of the room and squeezed through it. Using my binoculars, I had a good view from the hillside, even though the room was kept shadowy in the late afternoon by a jutting truss from the uphove roof. It must have been the den, since a large rock fireplace, partly-collapsed, was built into the outside wall. His footsteps stirred up a cloud of ashen dust that rose above the missing ceiling and hung softly in the air, shining reddish gold in the sunlight. By morning it would have alighted and then be swept away by the first violent gust and replaced by the second. The cookie man took off his hat and kneeled to one side of the fireplace and then fixed his stare on some kind of picture or painting within a tarnished gold leaf frame hanging on the wall. From my angle I could not see whatever magic was framed. When I climbed to a higher perch and zoomed in close I could see he was mumbling as if carrying on a conversation. I saw a tear or two join the sweat rolling

down the cracked mud on his cheeks. After a few minutes, he got slowly to his feet and left, his head hanging noticeably lower than when he came. My curiosity got the better of my exhaustion, and when he was gone I made my way down the hill to take a look at whatever it was that so devastated the cookie man. It took me twice as long as him to negotiate the ruins, but I finally reached the doorway to the room. Once my eyes adjusted, to my great surprise, inside the large gold leaf frame decorated with angels playing their harps there was no painting, no picture; there was nothing but a crack in the wall.

Today, I sit like a deranged Buddhist monk in a rag cloaked heap at the base of a dead giant oak outside the ruins of the Pioneer House Museum near the park entrance. While waiting for the cookie man, I ponder the terrible strangeness of our lives in the shadows. Of the seventeen Quail Springs residents left now, three, maybe four, will be dead within a week. The strongest of us is Roscoe, the young insurance agent who weighed three hundred pounds before the disaster hit. He has a cat, the last one in town as far as we know, who catches mice. He roasts the mice and feeds the both of them. Sometimes he has enough to share a bite for each of us. We still let him have his share of cookies. Of course, if he wanted to take them all we couldn't do anything to stop him except offer meek protests. I have no more protest left in me. I hope to die soon, perhaps today. But before I do, I have one last question I would like answered. When the cookie man passes by I call out, my voice raspy and weak. He stops and looks in my direction, obviously surprised. —Humor a dying man, my nameless friend, I say. —Why do you go to that house and kneel in front of an empty picture frame? It's none of my business, I know. But I guess my curiosity will die when I die.

—I'll tell you, mayor, he says, doffing his hat and wiping his brow with his sleeve. He takes a few steps toward me. —That house belonged to my parents. The frame used to hold a picture of my wife Salestine, my son Abe, my daughter Abby, and me. My wife died of cancer three years ago.

—I'm sorry. That explains a lot.

—It's okay. Truth is, when she died I turned to shit. No sense in sugarcoating it. I turned to shit and I didn't give a shit about anything. I was a geologist for the state, but I wasn't doing my job so I took a leave of absence. Thought a trip might help so I went to the New Jersey coast. Got into a fight with a loud Texan in a casino and when I hit the guy, the guy went down and stayed down. Permanently. They said he had an aneurysm burst in his brain. A freak accident. What was I supposed to do? The guy threw his cards at me and then punched me in the damn neck. Even the dealer said, please knock that asshole on his asshole. None of that mattered to the cops. I was convicted of manslaughter and sent to a private prison in Virginia.

—That's terrible!

—Yeah. It killed me having to leave my little boy and girl. No, me not being here to protect them was much worse than if it had only killed me. I went crazy in prison. Got thrown in the hole a lot. That's where I was when hell broke loose. I was in one of the safest places on earth, four stories underground. Guess that's why I didn't get sick. The only time I was glad I popped a guard in the jaw. During the riots all the cell doors opened. I managed to escape.

I start to speak but the words hang in my throat and I'm overcome by a fit of coughing. My heart pounds so hard it seems to rattle my rib cage. When I can speak, I say, —so you came back to find out about your children?

—I knew there wasn't much chance they were alive. It hit me hard when I saw what was left of my parent's house. When they sent me away, my parents took the kids. Abby was nine and Abe was three. I know that's our family photograph because of the frame. When I look inside that frame I can see their little darling faces and the face of my beautiful Salestine.

—I wish you would have told me this when you first came. I wish that more than I wish I could live a while longer to eat some more of those special cookies of yours.

—I'm sorry for your suffering. What else can I say? There's so much death... He looks up suddenly, squinting in my direction with renewed interest upon realizing what I just said. —Why did you say you wish I had told you?

—I can't tell you for certain, but I'm almost positive it was your children I saw alive about a week before you arrived. A little boy about that age and a cute little girl. They left town with a couple; they were part of a large group traveling in golf carts. The couple looked too old to be their parents. The man had a long walrus mustache and the woman was unusually tall and sort of exotic looking.

—What? That's them! That's my mother and father! It has to be them! You mean they're alive! They're long gone, aren't they? Of course they are! But they're alive? I can't believe they're alive!

I read his eyes, and although my face is covered by a scarf and a hat is pulled down low on my head, and even though I am sitting in dim shadow, I know this time it is

my nod that adds an appoggiatura. I swear the cookie man—so much leaner than when he arrived, yet still amazingly sturdy—almost topples over. He takes off his hat and throws it down, walks around in a circle with his hands balled into fists on his hips, then opens them to claw in anguish at his mud-caked face, all the while kicking at the rippled dust.

—Like I say, they only left about a week before you arrived.

—Going which direction?

—Northwest, I believe. I think their idea was to follow Interstate 80 all the way up to Lake Strindberg. I think Al-Hamidiyeh was their destination, but I can't say for sure. They were with a group of about eight. I thought it was a good idea myself, but my wife was too ill to go and Micki didn't want to leave, either.

—How were they...I mean physically?

This is more words than he's spoken in the entire time he's been here. And this is the longest conversation I've had in months and I'm exhausted and my throat so raw I can barely hear myself speak. The visitor steps closer when he hears me try to retch up the words. I hold up my withered, rotting hand and bow my head.

—No...please. I catch my breath and the last words I will ever speak to him come out in a choked rush. —The kids looked fine. Your mother strong. Father okay, I think. You have long way to go. Good luck, friend.

—Same to you, he says to me. He picks up his hat and slaps it against his leg to shake off the dust before he fastens it to his head. —I'm sorry I can't stay until... I wish there was something I could do.

I wave for him to go on. He knows what I mean.

—By the way, my name is Paul. I didn't mean to treat it like it was a secret, but I didn't think I deserved a name. Goodbye.

I watch him walk away, and for the first time, I see spring in his step, life in his carriage. Now he has a purpose. Now he has meaning. Now he has hope. Regardless of what happens on his journey, he is leaving this town a richer man. His family—the two kids, the grandparents—are dead, of course. I knew them from soccer league and Little League baseball. Good people, his parents. Salt of the earth. Some of the first to die as I recall. The children went to live with someone else in town, but I don't remember who, and it doesn't matter since they're all dead, anyway. Paul, the cookie man deserves more than an empty frame. I'm proud of the lie I told him. It will give my dying some meaning and purpose, too, since hope is out of the question. Giving him a lie to believe in is the only way I could think of to repay him for the cookies. I hope he can pack enough cookies for the hard journey across the desert.

## Clutter

*David LaBounty*  
*Michigan, USA*

Bethany calls me while I am sitting at my desk. It's the morning and my desk is cluttered. There are unopened envelopes and half empty coffee cups and sticky notes saying so and so called and that they want me to call them back. My desk is always cluttered because I put things off. I don't file or throw things away until my desk gets completely full. I don't answer emails or return phone calls unless there's a deadline

But I don't look cluttered.

My hair is always cut. My face is always shaven and my shirt is always tucked in and I would have to say I look very average. If you see me in a crowd you won't remember me.

Bethany calls me while I'm sitting at my desk and Bethany isn't my wife.

Bethany is someone else's wife.

Bethany calls me and my wife's name is Carla and Carla doesn't know about Bethany.

And I have to wonder if Carla has her own Bethany somewhere, on the end of a telephone. I wonder if Carla receives phone calls from some man I don't know while she waits for the kids to get off the bus. I wonder if she has a smile on her uncluttered face as she grins at the world outside our living room window, a grin that remains after she puts her phone back in her pocket and opens the door to let our children in.

I doubt it. I'm pretty sure I'm all Carla has.



Meanwhile, Bethany says,

Hey baby.

I say,

Hey.

I say hey and think about Carla and I check my watch. Carla is probably kissing our children goodbye before they rush out the door to catch the school bus. Carla probably thinks I'm slaving away right now to help support our family, how she is a housewife and how I'm a working man and that's how the world is and how the world is supposed to be.

Bethany says,

I'm lying in bed with my dog and cat and I was thinking about you...

That makes me smile and cringe. It makes me smile because here I am an average guy with a cluttered desk getting a phone call from a woman lying in bed, a bed I've never seen but somehow I think the bed is cluttered; cluttered with twisted sheets and stacks of pillows.

Cluttered with a lounging dog and a purring cat.

It makes me cringe because a man with a cluttered desk and clean house at home doesn't deserve or need to be thought of by someone else's wife as she is lying in bed.

I want to ask Bethany what she's wearing and if her husband is home. I've never seen her husband: to me he's just the body of a man with a shadow for a face.

But I don't ask Bethany this because someone a desk away tells me Carla is on line 5 and that's not unusual because Carla always calls me as soon as the kids have

walked out the door. She calls me as she collapses into the couch with a cup of coffee and the remote control in her hand.

I tell Bethany that I have to go and that I can't do this anymore. There will always be Carla calling me on line 5 and that I'm not ready to upset my world.

What I don't say is that I'm not ready to clear off my desk nor do I see myself with a clean desk any time soon.

Bethany hangs up on me.

I pick up line 5.

Carla says,

Hey baby.

I say,

Hey.

And I think about smoking. How I quit smoking fifteen years ago and how I wish I was smoking now. How I really need something to do with my hands.

*Excerpt from Novel The One Percent*

*Jeremy Birkline  
Houston, USA*

*Freedom in Captivity*

It felt like my new captor's eyes were burning holes in me. Then again, I could only get glimpses of him from my position on the floor. I wasn't even sure he was looking at me, let alone staring at me. Maybe it was the drugs. I felt like barfing. It could be disastrous if I wasn't fully aware and functioning before I started this next confrontation. I dared not glance up toward him for more than a second, and through my blurry vision, he looked more like a blob than a man anyway, so what was the point of risking it?

It was only through the constant, repetitive footfalls that I could tell he was pacing. I tried to keep my shoulders relaxed and let my limbs fall as they would. To the untrained eye, it might appear as though I'd rolled up in a ball and used my own body as a pillow. If he thought I was asleep, I wasn't going to lead on that I wasn't. Then again, who was I to tell if I was awake? The things that had happened in the last few weeks were so impossible. Maybe I was asleep right now and having some kind of terrible nightmare. Maybe escaping from the Military Academy had been a part of that nightmare.

But I remembered it all so clearly! Flashes of violent attacks, of planning our escape, of everything going wrong so fast flooded my blurry vision. Damn, how had I gotten into this mess? Despite the odds against us, I remembered escaping the Military

Academy. Veronica and I had gotten out and even managed to get off that cursed planet that had held us prisoners for so long.

Our only hope for survival now was to run, as fast as we could. Every chance we got, we stowed away on transports. Sometimes, we would just walk on like we were passengers. After we took our seats, Veronica would walk up to the conductor and speak silent words to him and he would never bother us. In this way, we found ourselves moving fast from one space station to the next.

I remembered all too clearly the moment between transports, when we were supposed to be resting, that Veronica looked at me gravely. Her bright blue eyes stood out against our dirt and grime filled surroundings -- the tumble of her golden curls, matted and filthy evidence for the way we'd been living. The dust and sweat across her otherwise flawless face echoed the past glory of the now discarded alleyway we found ourselves in. She had the look in her eyes that made me know I was about to agree to something I would never normally agree to.

"We have to separate," she told me, and like the coward I was, I agreed to it. I knew that she was right. We stood a better chance of getting away if we only had to worry about ourselves, but that first night she was gone was the loneliest I'd ever been. I was still on that same space station where she abandoned me when I realized I had stayed too long. The Military Academy could be right behind me. I searched the catalog of docked or docking ships, but there was only one on the docked list, and none on the docking list. Then I was met by a shock bigger than Veronica leaving me. The one ship that was docked was the same ship that my father was stationed on. I should have taken it as a sign, but I didn't.

It was a deep space warship being sent to patrol the border of the Intergalactic Court's influence. If I could manage to sneak aboard and stay hidden until we reached the border, I might have a chance to steal a shuttle, or sneak off on a friendly space station on the other side of the border. In a funny way, it was poetic. This ship was the cause of my captivity at the Military Academy. With my father serving on it, he had no choice but to finally give the Military Academy guardianship over me. I didn't know if he had known what they were going to do to me or not. It seemed fitting that it would bring me to my freedom.

It surprised me how easy it was to sneak aboard an Intergalactic starship. All I had to do was hide under a crate that was being moved through the docking area and wait until they brought me into the cargo bay. A few buttons later and all the ship's sensors could detect was the false reading I was feeding it.

I kept out of sight until everything was brought back and forth from the cargo bay before I made myself comfortable. The cargo bay was by far the largest area in the ship. It spanned three decks up. I couldn't even see the end to it. Crates of varying sizes were stacked up across the entire area, making it simple enough for me to manhandle the crates into a position that concealed me from someone just walking into the bay. The sound of the ship during disembarkation was loud, even more so in the normally empty cargo bay, but for me it was like putting my ears on fire. Then the lights turned off, leaving me in pitch blackness. I looked to the hands that I knew should be right in front of me, but there was nothing! Where were my hands!? My heart was beating faster than it did when I was in a fight! I closed my eyes and tried to take a deep breath, reminding myself that when I opened my eyes they would adapt to having no light, and

the outlines of my surroundings would become clear. They always did – every time I woke up as a child in fear of what might come after me, every time the Military Academy would leave me in that dark, minuscule room.

Time seemed irrelevant in the darkness. It could have been hours later when the lights came back on, sending my eyes into a new adapting faze. It took me too long to figure out what was happening. A man had come in. He was typing at the console next to the door, probably seeing if the supply he needed was in here.... But if he was doing that, then why was I suddenly getting dizzy? Why were my eyes watering? Why was the guy rushing out? What had caused the world to go upside down?

When I woke up the first thing I did was vomit in a conveniently located trash can. I could feel the residue of the drugs in my system. It almost felt as if my guts were trying to expel themselves from my body. I knew that the urge to throw up would slowly fade as my body expelled the toxins, but it would seem like hours to me.

After I was finally able to look away from the trash can without wanting to vomit some more, I noticed that my vision was blurry. My muscles were stiff. I could still feel the lingering nausea in the back of my throat, the burning acid bubbling up in my stomach. Before I went into another fit I curled myself in a protective ball, which eased the tension in my stomach a little bit.

“Sit down,” my new captor said as he caught a minute jerk of my arm.

I took a brief glance up and was surprised to see the chairs and tables in the room’s center. I didn’t want to risk showing too much awareness just yet, so I continued to listen to his footsteps. His weight banged on the floor plating. I doubted that it was

because he was overweight; more likely he was muscular. When he was forced to repeat himself, he got louder.

“I’m quite comfortable here,” I retorted after a short time. My voice broke halfway through. My voice sounded harsh from not being used for so long.

I looked up to see his reaction as I spoke and got my first good look at him. He was bald, but seemingly by preference as he seemed to grow plenty of hair elsewhere (his eyebrows and nose especially). His cheeks were red with anger. His hazel eyes looked at me with disgust. I was neither surprised nor intimidated by his huge stature. There were few people who could do much damage to me.

“Sit down!” the bald man shouted at me.

I thought of a sarcastic response, but bit it back and replied, “Sure, dude, whatever floats your boat.” Maybe it was a mistake, but I can’t help but say what comes to my mind, especially after what men like this guy had done to my friends and me over the last few months.

I stood, and the drugs washed over me with a new fervor.

## The Mirror

K.L. Stover  
Maine, USA

"I'm tired," said Danielle, slumping to the ground, "all we do is walk."

"It's only a few more miles to town," replied Emily. She felt bad for her little sister.

It was midday on the hazy Kansas plain, and Emily could feel the heat, like a candy coating, on her freckled face and arms. The pink petticoat she wore had been thrown on in haste that morning, almost as an afterthought. Now she wished she had worn a jumper or some shorts. Emily was twelve years old and particular about the way she dressed.

"How far is a few miles?" asked Danielle, brushing a horsefly away from her reddening cheek. She was in no hurry to continue.

"It's not too far, Danny. Please. Let's just go." Emily was also hot and miserable, but she wouldn't tell her sister that.

"You sound like Momma," said Danielle.

"I do not," Emily answered, flattered by the comparison.

Suitcase in hand, the smaller of the two girls struggled reluctantly to her feet. Blisters were already rising on both of her heels, but she would act like a big girl today. She had decided that she would not cry.

"Where are we going, Emmy," she said, "I forgot." Danielle had called her 'Emmy' since she was old enough to talk, and Emily didn't mind. Back then everyone said how cute it sounded. Things were different now.



"We're going to Clifton," said Emily, "be careful, Danielle."

Her arms spread wide for balance, Danielle walked the steel rail. Occasionally the sun winked off the hot steel, dazzling Emily's eyes.

When Danielle grew bored with walking the rail, she jumped down onto the softer gravel shoulder of the rail-bed. The crushed rocks baked in the sun, and she could feel the heat rising from her ankles to her knees. She had a question she wanted to ask Emily, but kept forgetting it. She always had a question for Emily.

"I bet Clifton is a long long long long way off that is so far we'll be half grown up when we get there." A statement, she figured, was better than another question.

"You're foolish," Emily replied.

"You sound like Momma again," said Danielle. Emily decided her little sister was pretty smart. Especially for someone who was only six and a half.

The journey hadn't been as bad that morning, before the heat took the day. After Emily had dried Danielle's eyes and blown her nose, they had made a game of counting the railroad ties. Stepping on each beam, they had tallied fifty-nine timbers before they both tired. Danielle had been amazed by her older sister's mathematical prowess, and games were always fun.

They trudged on, too hot to speak. Now there was only the steady crunch of the searing gravel under their feet, and the intermittent howl of the hot breeze whipping the open plain. Emily had always lived on the flatlands, but now she felt small and inconsequential walking the featureless terrain.

Danielle didn't like it when her sister was so quiet.

"I'm hungry," she said, just for the sake of conversation. Even as hot as it was, she had yet to whine. Danielle's father would have called her a "real trooper," thought Emily, and just as quickly put the thought of her stepfather out of her head.

"We'll eat when we get to Clifton," she said.

"But I'm hungry NOW," whined Danielle.

As Emily played the events of the day over in her mind, she began to feel guilty. She had no money for them, and food was probably out of the question today. They had left the house in such a hurry that she had not thought to take food. She bit her lower lip now, fighting back the tears that would surely burn her face if she allowed them to start. She could not let little Danielle see her upset.

"Grampa lives in Clifton, can we eat at Grampa's?" asked Danielle.

This hadn't occurred to Emily, and now she was convinced that her little sister was exceptionally smart. Maybe even smarter than herself.

"Yes, Danny," she said, "we'll eat at Grampa's."

The two girls felt better now, but for different reasons. Danielle started to skip, and Emily skipped right up beside her. Danielle began to giggle and Emily felt better, though not better enough to giggle.

The sisters held hands, swinging their arms as they skipped.

When Danielle grew winded, she stopped skipping and let go of Emily's hand.

"Why is Daddy so mean?" she asked.

The question had come from nowhere, and Emily didn't know how to answer it.. She left the railroad bed and sat on the parched embankment, aware, for the first time, of her labored breathing. Surveying the vast reaches of empty scrubland, she felt

lonelier than at any time she could remember. In the windy distance, the watery sunlight erased the horizon, and the earth seemed to curve upward and meet the sky.

The tears came against her will, running sticky down her chin. The heat made them worse, and she scratched at them, leaving red streaks where her fingers had been.

She quickly dried her eyes and nose with the back of her hand.

Without a word, Danielle joined her, sitting cross-legged on a patch of dried witch grass. She knew that her last question had upset Emily, and she regretted having asked it.

"We're going to live far away from here, Emmy, and he won't be able to find us and he won't ever hit me again."

Danielle's words held a certain brave comfort, and Emily's despair seemed to dry as quickly as the tears on her cheeks. Wiping her eyes once more, she flashed an awkward smile at her little sister.

When Emily opened her suitcase, Danielle did the same. Hers was actually a zippered hat case, but it seemed to fit her just right, and Emily was glad she had taken it from her mother's closet. From the elastic pouch of the suitcase, Emily produced a hand mirror. The mirror's handle looked like mother-of-pearl, but was really just white plastic. From the time her mother had given her the mirror for her birthday, she had known that she was almost grown up. Studying her puffy red eyes, she didn't notice that the mirror was already scratched.

Fishing another compartment in the suitcase, she found a yellow barrette, shaped like a butterfly.

"Danielle, let me put your hair up," she said, with the barrette pried open with her teeth.

"Why?"

"Because it's too hot hanging in your face."

"Okay," Danielle replied, stretching her neck as if primping.

When Emily had finished, she zipped the suitcase and tied her sneaker. "Let's go," she said, holding her hand out for her sister.

"No," said Danielle. She had spoken quietly, but was now shaking her head emphatically.

"We've got to find shade, Danielle," said Emily, trying to stress the importance of her request without scaring her sister.

"My feet hurt," said Danielle, pouting.

When Emily noticed the little girl's sunburned arms for the first time, she began to cry again, harder this time.

Danielle immediately ran to her side.

"I know why you're crying," she said.

"Why?" sniffled Emily. She couldn't bring herself to look at Danielle, whose sunburnt arms wouldn't bother her until the next morning.

"Because really you want to go back home, but you don't like it when daddy drinks. You think he will hit me again and you don't want me to be hurt like momma, but you want to go home."

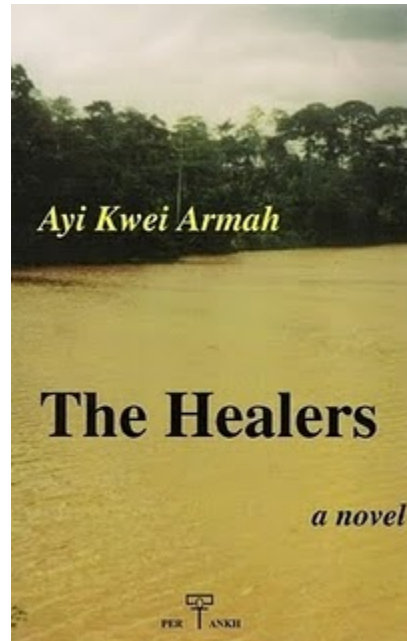
"Yes," said Emily, believing that somehow they would both be all right, now that the words of fear had revealed themselves and vanished in the air.

"Do you want to go home?"

"I want to go with you," said Danielle. She was glad that she had acted like a big girl today. She hadn't cried.

Emily searched Danielle's eyes and saw her childhood fly away. The two travelers turned and headed for home.

## They and Us Killed Us, A Review of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*



**Title:** *The Healers*

**Author:** Ayi Kwei Armah

**Genre:** Novel

**Publisher:** Per Ankh

**Pages:** 351

**ISBN:** 2-911928-04-0

**Year of Publication:** 1978 (this edition 2000)

**Country:** Ghana; Africa

**Reviewer:** Nana Fredua-Agyeman

Authors write for different reasons. To some writing has a therapeutic effect. Some write to express a personal opinion, some write toward an idea whereas others write from an idea. Others also write to project the views, aspirations and culture of a tribe. But Ayi Kwei Armah uses his writing to achieve a wider, larger objective of African unification.

**PLOT:** The period of the story is the nineteenth century when the colonialists are fighting the Asantes for control of the land and the Asantes are also fighting the Fantes to reclaim their land. *The Healers* tells of a young man, Densu, who was framed up for the murder of the heir apparent to Esuano's throne by his guardian Ababio, after the latter had unsuccessfully convinced the former to step up and claim the position. But Densu attracted by the work of Damfo, a healer decided to become a healer and so turned down his guardian's request and moved to the Eastern Forest where Damfo and his daughter Ajo, lives.

Meanwhile, at Cape Coast the colonialists had manipulated the chiefs and kings to provide the men required to fight the Asantes. The great battle that ensued saw fighters coming in from across the continent such as Dahomey, Hausas, Ada, Ga, Aneho, Akim, Ekuapem, Kru, Temne, Mande, Sussu and many others. Thus, whereas the Healers were working through inspiration to

unite the continent, the British colonialist using manipulation had brought together soldiers to fight the Asantes. The kings of Asante also afraid of losing their position of power succumbed to the colonialist, thus leading to defeat and division.

On the other hand, the kings of Asante blamed the healers for their decision and so sent soldiers, those who were to fight the whites, to ferret out the Healers and kill them.

The story is narrated by an omniscient narrator who showed himself or herself through emotional outburst such as an address to certain individual to surfeit him or her with words so that he or she could continue to narrate the story:

Ah, Fasseke, words fail the storyteller, Fasseke Belen Tigui, master of masters in the art of eloquence, lend me strength ... Send me words Mokopu Mofolo. Send me words of eloquence (page 63)

**MY THOUGHTS:** As an informal sequel to *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* tells of how for their crave for food to fill their paunch, drinks to glaze their eyes and pamper their nerves and silken clothes to lie upon, the so-called kings and chiefs of Africa plotted the continent's disunity. Thus, those who have taken oaths with the gods' swords and sworn upon the gods' names to serve the people became the served.



Ayi Kwei Armah exposes the causes of Africa's disunity: self-importance, the crave for power, lack of knowledge regarding origins and the smallness of the leaders' (kings and chiefs mainly) mind. If not for the love of power how then could Ababio frame his god-son, the orphan Densu, for the murder of the heir-apparent so that he, Ababio, would ascend to the throne at Esuano with ease? or the queen mother of Kumase work against the war strategy of Asamoa Nkwanta, the mighty warrior for the Asantes (the Osajefo), because she fears that should the war be won the latter would fight them for the throne at Kumase? According to the queen mother the wisdom of a king lay in knowing at all times what to do to remain a king. If what should be done now was to yield a bit to the whites, better that than lose all power to an upstart general (page 331)

If not for the lack of knowledge regarding origins, how then could the Asantes see themselves different from the Fantes, the Akims, the Ekuapems and many others, when they are all Africans?

Though Armah discussed the causes of Africa's disunity, he does not drum only doom and does not pretend to have quick answers to the problem. According to him there are the Healers whose

greatest work is to work towards the unification of Africa. To these Healers this scattering and individualism of Africans are but a temporary phase in the affairs of men and though they are persecuted by the kings and queens and chiefs of Africa they are not giving up. Slowly and carefully they believe they would realise this long-term objective.

Armah's penchant for writing on Africa's unification and recreating Africa's past does not blind him to certain inhuman practices accepted as tradition. In fact, he speaks vehemently against such acts and attributes them to selfishness, lust for power and ignorance.

Scaling up Armah's novel, it becomes easier to see these events in present-day Africa. How many times haven't Africans working to create the unity of the continent been killed: spiritually or physically? Think of Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba and many others. Think also of the author's own halleluya when he wrote his famous novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and his immediate crucifixion and fall from grace when he wrote *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. Why? Because these two novels blame the whites and some ignoramuses of Africa for Africa's current predicament. Because these novels show how Africans can put the past aside and work towards the future, towards the goal of black unification. Because when such a unification is achieved these people of power would lose their positions and such positions would no longer be necessary. And this is what the Ostentatious Cripples and the Vultures are not prepared to hear or to have it heard. Yet, like Healers such as Damfo, Armah knows the final result of their small works may not be realised now or even in their lifetime; it may be realised centuries after we are all gone. The peaceful and the most enjoyable part is that IT SHALL COME TO PASS when the parts shall become whole.

Finally, Armah bemoans in this novel of how every affair of man is about competition, about victory and loss rather than about collaboration. Currently, if a company had to pollute rather than incur huge financial losses, it would pay its way to pollute even if such pollution would lead to the death of men and of things. In the media it is common to see TV crews fighting to cover a child dying of hunger than to see them actually helping the child. It is profit first, life last. Whatever would put money in the bank account would be highly competed for even if it would lead to the death of its victims. This is how capitalism has been defined today.

In reading *The Healers* you can see Armah in motion, moving to and working from Senegal and talking to the people of the continent, sowing the acorns of realisation and working tirelessly to ensuring that the healing of Africa's wound, the spiritual awakening of dead souls, that the path to origins would once again be found. I end with a beautiful quote from the book:

Let the error raise its own correction (Page 8)

I recommend this book to every individual. However, I say read *Two Thousand Seasons* before reading this. This is not just a novel, it is a text book, a book that inspires understanding, love, and begs for action.

In Ghana, a copy of this novel could be obtained from the University of Ghana's bookshop. Current issues are published by the author's publishing house PER ANKH, where copies could be obtained.