

# The Criterion

**December 2012**

ISSN 0976-8165

**Vol. III. Issue IV**

**An International Journal in English**

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Alienated Soul of Richard Wright in *Black Boy*

**Bhakti D.Kulkarni**

Research Student,  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur.  
Maharashtra

Richard Nathaniel Wright was an African-American author of novels, short stories and nonfictions. He was renowned for his autobiographical book '*BLACK BOY*' (1945). It describes his early life from Mississippi to Chicago, his troubles with white employers and social isolation. This autobiographical novel is based on Richard's experiences growing in the south and North America. It is the poignant tale and also the quest of a sensitive mind for self discovery. '*Black Boy*' contains the themes of alienation. The present paper is an attempt to focus on the alienated soul of the author in the '*Black Boy*'.

Alienation has become the central idea in modern literature. There are more interpretations elaborated by some sociologists. Ignace Feuerlicht has given three main meanings of this word; first it meant the transfer of rights or property; second the act or result of turning away from friends (estrangement); and third, insanity (Feuerlicht,1978:3) It is the feeling of meaninglessness about life. The word alienation is derived from the Latin word 'Alienatio' (n).It is a noun form of the verb 'alienare'. Alienare means to make a thing of other. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "A term used with various meanings in philosophy, theology, psychology and social sciences usually with emphasis on personal powerlessness, meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation or self estrangement." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1979:243) According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Alienation means "The action of estranging or state of estrangement in feeling or affection."(Oxford, 1973:219). There is no universally accepted definition of this concept as its interpretations vary as well as the definitions of alienation express different thoughts. Many centuries ago, some of the principal themes of modern theories of alienation appeared in European thought, in one form or another. There are five major aspects of alienation. Man's alienation from God, Society, Nature, Family and his Self.

The lament about being alienated from God or having fallen from Grace which belongs to the common heritage of Judeo-Christian mythology. The divine order has been violated and man has alienated himself from the ways of God.

Man's alienation from society took place because first man was living in small groups to protect from the savage nature and wild animals. Spread of education, easy supply of knowledge became responsible to break-up of man's bonds with his society. Industrialization, man's desire for profit, upper-lower classes based on their economic power split the man from his society.

Man's alienation from his self is the self alienation which occurs when man feels detachment rationally (cognitive) emotionally (affective) or actively (conative). Primitive man's worship of God created by him in his own image was itself an embodiment of his self alienation. He was enjoying superiority over him by accepting subordination.

Alienation is a timeless state of human condition. Ignace Feuerlicht states that alienation seems to be as old as man (Ignace Feuerlicht, 1978:21). Feuerlicht discusses how the alienation finds its expression in biblical stories of Adam and Eve. It is the story of alienation from God. It is impossible for any person to live alone, without any group or community. Because man is a

social animal. He lives in the society. Therefore social norms, conditions and controls affect the person's life. Such social conditions and norms vary in different societies. Sometimes psychological state and social status of an individual becomes responsible for person's detachment from the society. According to some sociologists alienation is a psychological state of mind where man becomes egoistical due to some passions. When social circumstances affect man's psychological development; he or she feels alienation that is called self alienation. When the natural development of the person obstructs due to civilization, developing industrialization, society, or private properties the pessimistic view grows in human mind which results into alienation.

In '*BLACK BOY*', Alienation outcomes through inequality and stark binary between White and Black. Richard was fully aware about it. He was experiencing racial tension, violence and segregation in racism. Richard Wright talks about his experience of Nigro-ness. In his innocence perhaps he did not know the most prominent thing was something he could never misplace- 'the color of his skin.' He was a Negro and this fact became hostile for his existence. In his childhood and adolescence American racial matters, white black conflicts were fostered within him. Wright's early experience pulls him to flight from the south to introspect and to learn about himself.

Karl H. Marks, the German philosopher, has put forward the theory of alienation. Before him Hegel, termed it as 'Entfremdung', For Hegel, then, the everyday world in which person's live consists, at one and the same time, of objects which are necessary to, and express human life, but from which they are alienated; and which, in both cases, are the products of people's activity, without which neither objects nor persons would be. For Hegel, alienation is the inescapable fate of humanity and its object world. Alienation is thus inherent in human life which necessarily and everywhere creates the social world by making and using objects, while making and transforming itself in that very process. At some point, however, these objects no longer coincide with human purposes, the object world and the inner world are no longer in gear, and men cease to recognize the object world as having been brought into existence by their own human activity.

Hegel's philosophy is both the fundamental source of Marx's own analysis of alienation and a central polemical target that Marx uses to formulate his own distinct position. Most basically, Marx changes the site in which alienation is seen to manifest itself, as well as the conditions conducive to it. For Marx, the central locus of alienation is no longer in the making of all human objects; it has been narrowed to work products. Unlike Hegel, who stressed one-sidedly the valuable functions that labor performed for humanity, Marx stressed the "negative" side of labor that Hegel (as Marx recognized) had neglected, and he viewed labor as the major site of human alienation. Marx no longer regards alienation as a universal human phenomenon, but links it to the mode of production, in general, and to the property system of capitalism, in particular. For Marx, the critical locus of alienation comes to be situated in the work place. The decisive form of alienation is now not that of man but the worker's alienation from objects he produces and from the means of production with which he produces. This alienation, Marx came to hold, was a result of property institutions essential to capitalism, centering on that division of labor in which some—capitalists—own and direct the means of production and purchase the labor power of others—the proletariat—who are subject to their domination. For by reason of

their ownership of the means of production, the capitalist can direct their use and also own the products they produce.

The advent of machinery that could vastly increase the productive ability of workers ushered in economic system or organization that Marx termed as 'Capitalism'. Marx saw such economic system required the division of labor for efficient production. Capitalism was responsible for the emergence of class system. Capitalist owned the tools while laborers possessed only their labor power. Capitalist ruled over laborers under their power of economic conditions and owned the means of production. The laborer was forced to sell his service to the tool owner for his living. This degraded, exploitive and dehumanized relationship made distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Hunger is responsible to drive man towards work and the division of labor separates him from nature and from his own creativity leads to alienation from his true self.

Wright has felt that continuous hunger which kept him detached from himself and from his society. He protested against this hunger many times in the book. Wright's autobiographical novel '*Black Boy*' is nothing but the record of rebellious, spontaneous person against the white class supremacy. In the orphanage, he learns to distrust authority, symbolized by Miss Simon. When she tries to win his confidence, he rejects her: "Dread and Distrust had already become a daily part of my being and my memory grew sharp, my senses more impressionable. I began to be aware of myself as a distinct personality striving against others." (Richard Wright, 1945:29, 30) His deep hunger, fear brings him in the state of escape. "Out I go back? No; hunger was back there; and fear." He is aware that he has nothing to run to "In a confused and vague way I knew that I was doing more running away from than running towards something." (Richard Wright, 1945:31) His father was always stranger, always somehow alien and remote. In a scene at the end of the chapter first Wright describes the meeting with his father, twenty-five years after he saw his father with the 'strange woman'. "When I tried to talk to him I realized that though ties of blood made us kin, though I could see a shadow of my face in his face, though there was an echo of my voice, we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly distant planes of reality. (Richard Wright, 1945:34)

Richard came to knowledge that his father was a black peasant who had gone failed in the city; whose life had been hopelessly snarled in the city, and who had at last fled the city- that same city which had lifted Richard in its burning arms and borne him toward alien and undreamed-of shores of knowing. Parental rejection is an explanation of Wright's feeling of indifference and isolation within his own community, family and developing desire to escape the south.

The first chapter sets the scene for Wright's isolations from others in his environment. Here, Wright's future resistance to accept the authority of his parents, family and white community begins. Richard comes to know how easily Blacks have trapped for generations and he might repeat the pattern. When he was twelve years' old; he has alienated from most of his family because his family treats him as an outsider. He is always beaten by mother, grandmother, sometimes by relatives too. He is taught not to resist their slaps, but rather welcome them submissively. Uncle Tom beats him to discipline him. He is repeatedly threatened, injured by whites. For instance, when working in clothing stores, he was haphazardly threatened. At the optical company, Mr. Olin tries to get Richard and another young man Harrison, to kill each other, simply for his own sport.

Richard feels detachment from his classmates for next several years. He was alienated from his supervisors and coworkers when he worked part-time. It is because Richard was behaving differently than other Black children. The community tries to shame him into submission which he refuses. Richard determines to be a writer in his sixteenth but he knew the dangers of the Black youth having that aspiration while living in the south, so he decided of getting away and going to north in future.

Wright is rebellious in nature and whatever has described in '*Black Boy*' is objective and cool in tone. He is not religious like his mother and grandmother. His family and friends repeatedly try to convince him to pray god but he refuses because spiritually and intellectually he is alone as well as cynical and atheist too. Therefore he feels lonely in the Church. Wright cannot understand why Blacks are content to remain uneducated. He is clever and curious; questions about life and tries to learn new things.

Throughout his life Richard is violently forced away from the White world by fear of abuse. He was ignored or silenced even at work. No one was interesting in him. His suggestions were considered as skeptic or hostile. When he reaches at north, he feels lonely at first because he cannot understand what anyone is saying due to their different accents. Everyone around him was so different as to be impossible to relate him because he had no friends there until he meets the Irishman at the post office.

“At the age of twelve before I had had one full year of formal schooling, I had a conception of life that no experience would ever erase, a predilection for what was real that no argument could ever gainsay, a sense of the world that was mine and mine alone, a notion as to what life meant that no education could even alter, a conviction that the meaning of living came only when one was struggling to wring a meaning out of meaningless suffering.”(Richard Wright, 1945:100)

Autobiographies often provoke psychological analyses of their writers: one fascinating critical excursion into the psyche behind. '*Black Boy*' has been offered by Ralph K White. He attempts a summary of Wright's personality traits. He does not answer the question of to what extent Wright's experiences within his family affected his attitudes towards race relations. However, he does identify those characteristics of Wright which seem to intrude upon Wright's treatment of themes in many of his works. A tendency to be aggressive and to disapprove of others, a direction of aggressions towards southern whites, an emphasis on physical safety and security, a doubtful identification with other Negroes and a stereotyping of adults and white authority. All these personality characteristics might have originated in isolated experiences within his family. (Bringnano R. C., 1970:6) Richard, as some sort of heathen was isolated from the community. He was forced to attend and endure seventh day Adventist sermons of his granny. Though granny and his mother was frequently praying for him; Richard spiritually refuses to penetrate his shell and remains the ever stubborn heretic in his determination. Religion is also a cause of alienation because Richard does not share the same enthusiasm for religion as the community.

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