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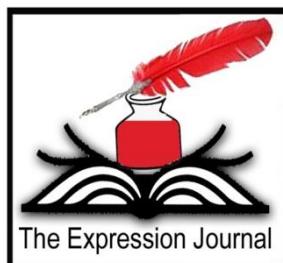
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## **PICTURIZATION OF REBELLIOUS SPIRIT COUPLED WITH FEAR AND HATRED BY RICHARD WRIGHT IN HIS *NATIVE SON* AND *THE OUTSIDER***

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to picturize the rebellious spirit coupled with fear and hatred by Richard Wright in his novels *Native Son* and *The Outsider*. Wright in his works depicts the rebels who are as truly outsiders scorned by the whites and feared by slavish Negroes and forced to select violence as their only resource. Wright deliberately accuses the whites for manipulating and controlling black behavior and emotions of destroying Negro fellowship and for creating rebels. Wright had a strong belief in political philosophy of communism but he did not see a book as a political weapon to overcome violence for the rebels. As a revolutionary action, he had a faith in creating a third world neglecting the Afro-American potential as he hoped for a cultural renaissance. Thus, this paper, through the analysis Wright's works, projects him as a different kind of fighter who used his rebellious voice and pen as his powerful weapons.

### **Keywords**

Afro-American Conflicts, Basic Rights, Revolution, Rebellion, Violence.

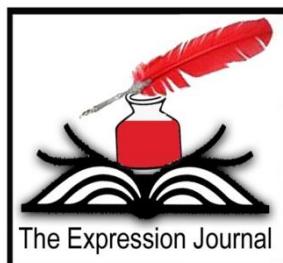
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## PICTURIZATION OF REBELLIOUS SPIRIT COUPLED WITH FEAR AND HATRED BY RICHARD WRIGHT IN HIS *NATIVE SON* AND *THE OUTSIDER*

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Richard Wright, born on September 4, 1908 into the poverty of Sharecropper life on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, had the spirit of a rebel right from his childhood. As a young boy, he rebelled against his authoritarian father by killing an innocence Kitten. In his short stories and novellas, he had created rebels. Scorned by Whites and feared by slavish Negroes, the rebels are truly outsiders whose only resource appears to be violence. Wright accuses whites of manipulating and controlling black behavior and emotions, of destroying Negro fellowship and creating rebels. He says in his autobiography.

"The shame and anger we felt, for having allowed  
ourselves to be duped crept into our blows....

The hate we felt for the white man.... went into  
the blows we threw at each other" (Black Boy 212)

Such displaced rage wraps most black friendship. In one of his short stories 'Big Boy Leaves Home', a romp in the woods ends disastrously as the protagonist, asserting his masculinity nearly breaks his friend's neck and shortly after shoots a white man in anger and in self-defence. Terrified of robbing a white shop-keeper, Bigger Thomas sublimates his fear by first killing a rat and then viciously attacking his friend Guz who senses his dread; "By first attacking less formidable black targets, Wright's rebels are emboldened to assail white a oppression. Such internecine warfare is inevitable when self-hatred flourishes and frustration has no outlet" comments Evelyn Gross Avery (P 17).

Each of the four stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) portrays the Negro in violent revolt against some phase of his environment. In "Donw by the Riverside", a long suffering Negro revolts against conditions that deny his wife in an equal chance at medical care and hospitalization. He is lynched after killing a white man who symbolizes that repression. In "Long Black Song", the Negro husband revolts against the idea of white man's using his wife for sexual purposes returning the next morning to collect money for a phonograph which he had persuaded the victim to accept. The husband slays the seducer and waits with loaded gun for the lynching mob Silas, the husband bemoans the lot of a blackman thus:

"The white folks ain never gimme a chance'.

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They ain nothing in you whole life. Yuh kin  
Keep from 'em'. They take you lan! They take you  
freedom! They take yo women.  
Then they take you life! .... Yu die of you fight.  
Yuh die of you don fight! Either way you  
Die'n it don mean nothing" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 212).

It reflects the nothingness of black living which that great white force produces. The search for death rather than the ignominy of fight or acceptance is a constant theme in these stories. Some of uncle Tom's children are defiant, may be futilely so, but they are defiant. In 'Fire and Cloud', the revolt is against crooked white politicians who try to frighten Negroes into political inactivity by mob violence against their leaders. 'Bright and Morning Star' was included later along with the four novellas in *Uncle Tom's Children* and published in 1940. Richard Wright's treatment of Communists in this story is more realistic of communists in this story is more realistic and perhaps a better reflection of his ambivalent feelings towards what Communism could do for the American Negro. Booker, a white infiltrator betrays the group to the police. Moreover, aunt Sue, one of Wright's strongest women characters, is really not converted to Marxism. More of a black individualist than anything else, she goes along with the movement because her Johnny Boy is in it. And when the mob kills starts shooting. She kills Booker first and thereby prevents him from informing on the rest of the members of their group. Like the principle characters in most of these stories, she knows that death can be an affirmation of one's dignity and selfhood, the only affirmation possible for the black masses. And Wright infers that out of these defiant rebellious acts of affirmation, a new bread of blacks will arise from the lowliest, the most oppressed. In this he was a prophet. In these stories, Wright is perfecting a technique which reaches its fullest development in *Native Son*. Michel Fabre in his biography remarks, "Uncle Tom's children, the new generation of Blacks, will no longer turns the other check and submit to white harassment as their parents had" (Fabre 160).

The subject matter of *Uncle Tom's Children* alone assured it a chorus of praise from the radical critics, Granvill Hicks, who reviewed the collection for 'New Masses', was particularly proud to see a new star on the revolutionary horizon. While the liberal Malcolm Cowley said in the April issue of 'New Republic' that it was both heartening as the evidence of a vigorous new talent and terrifying as the expression of racial hatred. The book was even mentioned somewhat later by Eleanor Roosevelt in her column for the 'New York Post'. She said that she had found it beautifully written and so vivid that she had a most unhappy time reading it. Baldwin and Ellison would have us believe that because Blacks are circumscribed by terror and fear, the eventual result is inaction. Far from it, none of Wright's characters is inactive; each refuses to accept the designation as non-human beings. Most are rebels, are sensitive men, who will make no peace with a world ruled by terrorists, who will never acquiesce to the reign of injustice in the universe, who will demand at all times, from the God of man, a just accounting.

The significance of Wright's novels taken together is that they Complement each other. *Native Son* demonstrates how black men must live and die in urban America. *The Long Dream* (1958) sums up how Blacks have lived and died in a South far different from that shown in the fiction of Jean Toomer or Zora Hurston. Together they do reiterate the theme that terror, intimidation, dread, and oppression constitute part of black truth in America. Condition has been so effective that when Bigger rebels, it is not so much against man, but against situations

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and conditions. Push this theory far enough and the major antagonist of *Native Son* is not man but some ephemeral entity called against Whites is the result of his own Paraonia. In a world ruled by white men violence is given, the black man becomes not madman, but where violence is the norm, the madman is the sanest men of all. When all is said and done, Wright remains a moralist and *Native Son*, an optimistic novel. Bigger's rebellion is not against American morality instead, against laws and rules that forbid him entrance into the mainstream of American life.

Very often it was fear that drove the young Richard Wright into rebellion. The lessons of mythology are untrue to life. In the story 'Big Boy leaves Home', Wright recreates a situation in which he fights back the Whiteman. Commenting on the story, Addison Gayle remarks:

"Fear was as constant in his own life  
as it was in that of the young boy" (Big Boy)  
holding the gun against an advancing  
white man" (Gayle 108)

The short that kills the soldier astonishes not only the white man, who dies in disbelief that the lessons of mythology are untrue to life but to the black boy himself, who through fear had courageously become a rebel. Addison Gayle continues:

"The writer who here to fore perceived the black community as paralyzed by fear and inaction, who long believed that it was incapable of meeting challenges posed by antagonists, now looks at that community in a new light." (P 109)

This attitude of Richard Wright may be attributed to his Marxist experience. The blacks are not more inactive, they are the pit of red-hot lava. "Big Boy Leaves Home" establishes the pattern for the stories to follow. This younger boy, innocent no longer, having achieved adulthood through fear, stands as a metaphor for the characters in the other short stories.

Richard Wright arrived in New York city in May 1937, accompanied by all the emotional baggage of old; the fear, suspicion, doubt, the longing for acceptance in the White world, coupled with the feeling that it would always reject him. The fear remained paramount. Marxism is a revolutionary call directed towards oppressed peoples everywhere, and its potential appeal to American Negroes' is self-evident. Wright's imagination was captured by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. Thus, he thought that atleast in the realm of revolutionary expression, Negro experience could find a home. Wright joined the Community Party in 1934, and till 1943, he came to believe in the essence of Communism, which to him conveyed:

"brotherhood, universality, hope of harmony  
universal reason and an assumption of  
natural, immutable moral laws." (Webb 157)

Though Wright was convinced that the political philosophy of Communism was correct, he did not see a book as a political weapon. He thought that the creative genius of a writer should be freed from all restrictions, especially those of a political nature and that the writer should do as he pleased. So he rebelled. *The Long Dream* is a protest novel that underlies the protest of a black man who would sacrifice, perhaps unintentionally, the preciousness of his art for the birth of human justice in his native land. *The Outsider* came out on\ March 19, 1953. Cross Damon in *The Outsider* is the least Negro of all Wright's black characters. One wonders why Wright bothered to make him a Negro at all. Except for a few god scenes like the one in

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which Cross Damon secures an illegal birth certificate by putting on an Uncle Tom act, the novel is not racial in the old fashioned, protest novel sense of the term. As a matter of fact, that author looked upon Cross Damon as a Black. The novel is an existential one. In the words of Darwin T. Turner, *The Outsider* is a revision and redefinition of *Native Son*. *Native Son* is the ironic title of the story of twenty year old Bigger Thomas, an uneducated Mississippi, born, Negro resident of Chicago. The title is ironic because though Bigger has been born in America, he is an outsider. As a Negro, he recognizes his exclusion from American Life. "... because he is shut out from the American dream which he sees in motion pictures, Bigger envies and hates the white people who can realize the dream. He cannot express his hatred directly, forcefully, consciously, for he fears white people too much" (Turner 164).

Tracing the similarity between the two novels, further Darwin. T. Turner feels that accidental murders in both the novels lead to a new life for the protagonist. He says:

"In character the two seem identical  
Bigger bullies others to conceal his own fears;  
Cross plays practical jokes. Both rebel against  
their mothers, who typify an older generation  
which urged Negro children to live according  
to the ethics taught in Christian Churches  
and prescribed for Negroes by a society  
dominated by White Man" (Turner 168).

Alienated from others, both Cross Damon and Bigger Thomas hate themselves. Darwin T. Turner continues:

"In the revision (*The Outsider*) as in the original (*Native Son*) Wright suggested  
that the sensitive, will be destroyed by the  
the existentialist, will be destroyed by the  
organized institutions which fear him  
because of they do not understand him  
and fear his questions because they  
cannot answer them" (P 172)

In hoping for a cultural renaissance and for revolutionary action, Wright had placed his faith in the Third World neglecting the Afro-American potential which was going to show itself much sooner than he expected. In short, it may be said that Richard Wright was a different kind of fighter using his rebellious voice and pen as his powerful weapons.

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