

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Iconoclastic Historicity in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Keshab Raj Gnawali**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**May 2008**



**Tribhuvan University**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Science**

This thesis entitled "Iconoclastic Historicity in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*"  
submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Keshab Raj  
Gnawali has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Acknowledgements**

I'm deeply indebted to my respectable teacher Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari for his scholarly guidance to bring this research to the present form. The way he guided and encouraged me in every step of this research is appreciable. So he deserves the deep sense of gratitude.

I'm also indebted to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma Bhandari, Head of Central Department of English, for allowing me this opportunity to research on. My deep sense of gratitude also goes to Prof. Dr. Abhi Narayan Subedi, Prof. Dr. Chandra Prakash Sharma, Dr. Beerendra Pandey, Dr. Arun Gupto, Dr. Sanjeev Upretry, Mr. Hem Sharma Paudel and Mr. Shankar Subedi for their scholastic guidance to bring this research in the present form.

I would like to extend my special thanks to my younger brothers Dhruba, Madhav and Sanjay, my elder brother Ravi Gnawali and sister Sabitra Gnawali without whose help, this work would have been almost impossible.

I'm very much grateful to my parents Mr. Ishwari Prasad Gnawali and Mrs. Ratna Gnawali for their continuous inspiration and economic support without which this research would have never come to the final touch.

I am also thankful to Resunga Computer Service, Kirtipur for its efficient typing of this thesis.

May, 2008

Keshab Raj Gnawali



## **Abstract**

Ishmael S. Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* presents an iconoclastic paradigm against the western perspective to view cultural history of African American people in American locations. In this novel, Reed rewrites the history of black people from a cultural praxis that dismantles the 'icons' of western metaphysics. While Reed tries to show the cultural history of black people from its origin to the present socio-political situation in America, he moves to the iconoclastic arena of historicity. The white conception of 'history' and 'culture' of black people is violated, dismantled and threatened in this novel. The struggle between Jes Grew and Wallflower order regarding the ancient Black Egyptian text *The Book of Thoth* and adaptation of multidisciplinary facets such as art, culture, myth and music from the perspective of African Americans questions the canonical culture and history. Furthermore, with the contextualization of Harlem Renaissance and Jazz culture Reed challenges the autonomy of western canon.



## Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

### **I. Introduction 1**

Critical Reviews on *Mumbo Jumbo* 12

### **II. Cultural Studies, Culture and Iconoclasm 18**

Introduction 18

African American Literary and Cultural Criticism: Dismantling the 'Icons' of

Historicity 27

Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Culture and Black Arts Movement: Attack on Canonical

Culture and History 34

### **III. Black Cultural History: From Myth to Politics 39**

Jes Grew: Symbolic Representation of Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Culture 47

Iconoclastic Historicity: Response to Mainstream History 54

### **IV. *Mumbo Jumbo*: The Text of Iconoclastic Historicity 66**

Works Cited 69



## I. Introduction

Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* questions the mainstream American literary tradition advocating the history of black art, culture, myth and music which address Black cultural origin, richness and its reflective mode valorizing the true black history from the perspective of the margin. By adhering to such black cultural heritage, Reed dismantles the 'icons' of western glance to view the culture and history of African American people. The mystery, the exploitation and the suppression of black people is traced through the description of struggle between Jes Grew, a union of African-American people and Wallflower order, an enforced arm of the Atonists and the representation of western logocentrism; Haitian black magical power known as 'Voodoo' which has the close affinity with the origin of musical orality and the black cultural civilization; assassination of the members of black arts students' union known as Mu'tafikah; burning the Black Egyptian text *The Book of Thoth* which was the property of the ancient popular religion of Isis and Osiris; and finally, the depression created by the Atonists to destroy the economic base of Jes Grew. Through the use of allegory, iconoclasm and reverence, Reed has been able to portray the real history of African American people in America.

*Mumbo Jumbo* can be read as the representation of iconoclastic historicity in that it dismantles the canonical notion of mainstream history writing which brings to our mind an array of ideas representing authority, materialistic bourgeois culture, monolithic and logocentric notion of the ubiquitous repressive power position. But *Mumbo Jumbo's* intention is not that of positioning history as a fascistic force in the name of history, rather to correct the stereotypes of western history by revising and rewriting the history of black people from the perspective of margin.



Throughout American history, African Americans have been discriminated racially. This experience inspired some black writers like Ishmael S. Reed to prove that they, too, were capable. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. says, "It is fair to describe the subtext of the history of black letters as this urge to refute the claim that because blacks had no written traditions they were bearers of an inferior culture" (qtd. in Stryz 140).

Critics assert that writing has traditionally been seen as "something defined by the dominant culture as a white male activity" (Stryz 140). This means, in American society, literary acceptance has traditionally been tied with the very power dynamics which perpetrated the evils like racial discrimination. However, by refuting the claims of the dominant culture, African American writers weren't simply "proving their worth" but also attempting to subvert the literary tradition of the United States. By borrowing from the oral traditions and folk culture of African Diaspora, African American literature thereby broke "the mystique of connection between literary authority and patriarchal power" (Stryz 140). This view of African American literature as a tool in the struggle for black potential and cultural liberation has been stated for decades, and Ishmael S. Reed can't be an exception.

Ishmael S. Reed is an unorthodox writer who has taken on the media, the literary tradition, feminists, politicians, blacks, whites and American institutions of higher learning. He is, therefore, considered as one of the best satirists in America after Mark Twain, even though his satire is controversial. He is multidisciplinary in his career having the fame in poetry, fiction and play as well.

With the relocation to Oakland, California, he published his first novel *The Freelance Pallbearers* in 1967. With his first novel, Reed established various themes and styles that would become his trademark. *The Freelance Pallbearers* is a satire



heavily critical on the western Christian tradition and the religiously indoctrinated so called formal literature of the tradition. In the second novel *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, published in 1969, Reed established his aesthetics of "Hoodoo" and folklore.

'Neohoodism' is the name Reed gave to the philosophy and aesthetic process he employed to take care of business on behalf of the maligned and mishandled. This African American version of *Voodoo* appealed to Reed because of its mystery and eclectic nature. It became a way for Reed to avoid western literary tradition while creating a new multi-ethnic voice. Reed respects Voodoo as a world view due to its ease of adaptation, flexibility, and its way of eating and dissolving into itself the other ways of living.

After the publication of his second novel, Reed started multifaceted career in Oakland initiating his extensive collections of essays, poetry, journalism, editing, publishing, play-writing, song-writing, television production, lecturing, teaching and founding of various organizations.

Reed's *New Hoodoo Manifesto*, a collection of essays, was published in 1972 and was nominated for the 'National Book Award.' Along with the career on novels and essays, Reed has written numerous poems and plays as well. Reed's play *Reckless Eyeballing* was published in 1986 which reveals his feelings about slavery in the limited states and Jim Crow era that followed abolition. In the novel, the practice of "reckless eyeballing" . . . a Blackman looking at a white woman -- is dealt with directly in Reed's satire.

Reed is a black minority experimentalist in that he discontents with black mainstream Negro novelists and he is also an unorthodox writer. In his essay "Black Literature", Nathan A. Scott Jr. writes about Reed, "[He] is clearly, one who considers mockery to be an essential office of the novelist, and his evident commitment to an



aesthetic of college, his penchant for the grotesque, his boisterous eschatology, and his zany lyricism do, indeed, put us in mind of the west of Balso Snell" (317).

"Whoever called him Ishmael," says Robert Scholes, "picked the right name. His hand is against every man's" (2). For the hilarious warlockery of his strange brand of hoodoo is directed not only against the demented bigotries of white America but also against those canting apparatchiks of the Black Mafia, who, in their own way, represent a special sort of betrayal. Reed's humour is never content with simply undermining the anglocentric notions of self and identity but also lampoons various dimensions of black essentialism, as "the afro-American idealism of a transcendent black subject, integral and whole . . . the 'always ready black signified" (Gates 251).

One of the most striking aspect of Reed's style is the complex patterns of his narrative. The way he deals with focalizers and avoids the hierarchical straight-jacket of authorial control confronts the readers with a confusing array of "voices" that somehow speak for themselves. Reed's fictional practice goes beyond the system of definitions provided by traditional literary theories of narratology and focalization. The notion of "free indirect discourse", for example, cannot explain the way Reed combines narration and focalization.

In his multi-dimensional career, Ishmael Reed basically deals with the issues of African-American people, their plight and their struggle for the existence and identity in American location. He is an "iconoclast" in his thinking (John G. Parks 163), so he dismantles the established literary tradition as well as the western mainstream vision of considering African-American culture, tradition and history. To dismantle such notions, Reed takes help of satire, allegory and other literary and figurative devices in his writing.



Reed published the sensational novel *Mumbo Jumbo* in 1972 focusing on the issues of art, music, culture, myth and history of African American people. In this novel, Reed portrays the black cultural richness, their struggle for existence and their search for origin. Even though, there is the presence of logocentrism in the name of Atonists who are the monotheists, Reed forces those characters to support for the black music known as Jazz and black cultural heritage.

*Mumbo Jumbo* chronicles the struggle between 'Jes Grew'- the spirit of blackness in the 1920s America which enlivens its victims into dancing, swinging, singing and talking crazy; and the 'Wallflower Order' – the enforcer arm of the Atonists which is opposed to dancing and desperately struggles to stamp out Jes Grew before it undermines the Atonist order completely. The struggle centers over the search for the ancient black Egyptian text *The Book of Thoth*. However the deliberate economic crisis created by the Atonists to stamp out Jes Gew kills the spirit of blackness for a moment though not forever and the novel ends with the hopeful futuristic declaration of Papa Labas' that they will make their own future text.

*Mumbo Jumbo* appears to be an attempt at creating a text for today. It stimulates to research ancient history of the African American people, their traditions and the magic prevalent in the African culture which has wrongly been defined by the western metaphysics. It also depicts the relationship of song and dance, art, magic and myth in the context of people's religion and class society and thereby provides a comprehensive non-white mythological interpretation of world history, i.e. from the point of view of the victims of history, who seldom have the opportunity to write history books.

Set in 1920s, which is a period of 'Harlem Renaissance', "A period of remarkable creativity in Literature, music, dance, painting, and sculpture by African



Americans' (Abrams 114), Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* is "the best mystery novel of the year" (Shrovetide 132) that unfolds the cognition to whites about the mystery of black cultural heritage and its richness, black mythic saga and the origin of black people. *Mumbo Jumbo* is a "composite narrative composed of subtexts, pretexts, post-texts, and narratives-within-narratives" (Gates 220) which also includes oddities as pictures, footnotes and a bibliography as parts of the novel. This structure of the novel also attacks the canon formation of western metaphysics.

The contact between Black culture and western civilization long dominated by the fascist force of Atonism, which is Puritanism, anti-humanism, oppression of 'Omnipotent Central Administrator' produced interesting results. The Atonists, who were the power-holders and wanted to stamp out African religion from the American location and impose their monotheistic and logocentric religion over all the people of America, rather conquered by the magical force of Black music and dancing and became interested by the language associated with the music, art, culture and history of African origin.

Fiction is actually shaped by history. The long established dichotomy between history and fiction presupposed that the latter belonged exclusively to the domain of imagination and subjectivity whereas the former to that of reality and truth. It was only very recently that the traditional clear-cut division established in the eighteenth century, when novel emerged as a literary genre has been questioned. Now a days, the boundaries between history and fiction are being blurred. Literature, particularly fiction, "is treated as a mode of history, its pretensions to a quiddity of its own taken as further evidence of the times in which it was composed" (Paul Hamilton 394). In fact, there are critics who claim that since history and fiction are linguistic constructs and are highly conventionalized in form, they should be treated on the same foot. So,



postmodern fiction, explicitly or implicitly, questions, parodies, imitates or incorporates history. Thus, the relationship between history and fiction traditionally defined by its mutual exclusion is nowadays characterized by its understanding the task of consciously telling the stories of those forgotten or marginalized by the history.

*Mumbo Jumbo* depicts the reality of African American people in America. In this novel, on the one hand, Reed attacks the established customs and values in American location and on the other hand, he sketches the history of African American people. The mystery of African Americans relies not upon the applicators of power position but upon the actual sufferers who experience and face the exploitation, injustice and segregation from the power holders. Therefore, Ishmael S. Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo* discloses the history from the origin to the contemporary periods, satirizing and applying the figurative device of allegory to the so called mainstream practice, his adoption of 'New Hoodoo' aesthetic, his dismantling of the order of the form and his teasing on organic unity parodies the 'system' and 'order' of the western metaphysics on the one hand and on the other hand, this style reaches towards the reality in that the history of black people is dismantled, suppressed and exploited by whites.

### **Critical Reviews on *Mumbo Jumbo***

*Mumbo Jumbo's* hilarious experimentation upon the black trauma in American location has pulled the critical responses in the considerable length. Various critics and interpreters have analyzed this novel applying different theoretical modalities and perspectives such as post-modernism, deconstruction, symbolism, archetypal criticism and so on.



Analyzing this novel as the detective story, critic Richard Swope, in his review, considers 'Hoodoo Detective' on the boundary in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Applying postmodern insight to the interpretation of this novel, he further admits that this novel is not the traditional allusion of detective fiction rather it encompasses the polyvocal and multi-textual paradigm, hence it is postmodern detective fiction. He further admits:

Cultural synthesis is, in fact, the goal of *Mumbo Jumbo* itself: a textual crossroads that in its sheer polyvocality as well as its multi-textuality questions both the adherence to a singular truth espoused by the western detective story as well as the more general, one-minded univocalism of Atonism. (619)

His method of interpretation relies upon the fact that *Mumbo Jumbo* is the novel questioning the monoglossic and univocal tendency of deriving the singular truth. Hence the novel is a postmodern novel.

Emphasizing the inductive narratology of detection, Sami Ludwig interprets this novel as Reed's non-essentialist inductive strategy of identifying forces. Shedding light upon the structure of the novel, he says, "All of Reed's voices co-exist in the same realm of direct dialogue, including the voice of the narrator, which is merely another one among them. As a result, his prose turns the reading experience into a cross roads zone of Bakhtinian polygvoal interaction" (437).

He tries to posit Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* with Bakhtinian theory of polyglossia which is an open-ended feature where multiple voices can occur. Assessing upon the use of free narratology he further remarks, "Just as poets once turned to freeverse; Reed presents a kind of free narratology" (438).



Interpreting this novel from the perspective of humour or laughter and identity, Sharon A. Jessee sees the dualism of black and white ethnic identity dramatized in the narrative which Reed's humour not only reverses, but dismantles. He further says:

*Mumbo Jumbo*, through its humorous verbal play, satirizes [those] descriptive terms (consistency and unity). Indeed, one consistent aspect of the novel is its inconsistency in speaking styles . . . Reed's code switching humour, [then], problematizes both the notion of ethnocentric boundaries and the conventional western concept of a unified self. (137)

*Mumbo Jumbo*, in his interpretation, problematizes both the ethnocentric boundaries and conventional western concept of unified self through the medium of humor and satire.

In the novel, there are photographs, paintings and other illustrations. Assessing this novel from the perspective of such illustrations, Reginald Martin says, "The illustrations in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, heretofore unlabeled and undefined, are more than graphic representations of scenes from the text: they are, in fact, symbolic aggrandizements of motifs stated and hinted at throughout the narrative" (55). According to him, those illustrations explicate the text by serving as contemporaneous narrative indices to solidly root the narrative in its time settings, 1920's America, pre-dynastic Egypt and a college classroom in the 1960's, and those illustrations that have no direct textual referent are used to expand the multiple and layered meanings of the narrative through pyramidal association. He unfolds the symbolic manifestation of illustrations in the novel.



With the opinion related to Jacobson's theory of metaphor and metonymy, Amy Elias says;

[The] Atonists apply metonymical strategies to the data of history, and those reductions may take the form of agent-act or cause-effect relationships. The Mu'tafikah are seen as agents in the cause of unreason, as in Jes Grew; to wipe out these causes is to wipe out unreason and the threat to civilization. (120)

According to this interpretation, the atonists are understnadbly threatened by the non-directional, improvisational, individualistic impulses of Jes grew, for the Hoodoo perspective is based not in metonymy but metaphor.

In his scholarly article based upon the interpretation of *Mumbo Jumbo*, Carol Siri Johnson sees one aspect of hegemonic rule as that of all groups outside the master group which are invisible in the socio-cultural production. He says:

*Mumbo Jumbo* is a text of the colonized that appropriates and revises myths of the colony to deconstruct or "signify on" the white and black literary canons . . . Ishmael reed uses the myths of Egypt- of Isis, Osiris and 'The Book of Thoth' – as an analogy for the condition of the African American canon in the western hegemonic world. (105)

This basis of interpretation is on the post-colonial scenario which deconstructs the dichotomy between power holders and suppressed in relation to the white and black literary canons.

*Mumbo Jumbo's* interpretation is possible from the multiple and polygamic perspectives in that it sets the various and open-ended layers of interpretation.

Focusing this possibility, Roxanne Harde says:



*Mumbo Jumbo's* ultimate move is to revere language, to breathe new life into what has been deadened as definitive iconic text, and to allow for comprehension of multiple interpretation and realities. Reed works his way systematically through multiple texts, devaluing each in turn, beginning with his own novel. (369)

This analysis foregrounds the feature of postmodernism where Roxanne Harde sees multiplicity of interpretation of the same text because it unfolds the various local narratives or meta-narratives instead of iconic grand narrative. He focuses on the reincarnation of definitive iconic text.

From the tracing of multiple layers of interpretations mentioned above, it can be said that the novel has gathered immense criticism from a number of scholars. But, it is still virgin with respect to the cultural praxis shedding light on the iconoclastic historicity which the researcher wants to explore. The history and historicity weaved by the power position foregrounded the glory of themselves undermining the vast population of African Americans. So, the researcher aims to foreground the history of margin focusing on the issues of Black culture, myth, musical richness and the celebration traced by the writer in *Mumbo Jumbo* attacking the established mainstream canonical tradition of writing history.

The present research has been divided into four chapters. the first chapter presents the short introduction of the author with his works; a brief outline of the novel *Mumbo Jumbo*; literature review of *Mumbo Jumbo* and an introductory outline of the present research itself. This chapter introduces the study terrain of present research incorporating the subject matter of research.

The second chapter explains the theoretical modality which is to be applied in this research. It provides short introduction of cultural studies which foregrounds the



study of margin. In the present context, cultural studies proposes the study of African American people and their cultural instinct. Cultural criticism views oppressed people as victimized by the dominant power structure but capable of resisting or transforming that power structure. An endeavor in cultural studies is to subvert the distinctions in traditional criticism between "high literature" and "high art" and what were considered the lower forms that appeal to a much larger body of consumers. Typically cultural studies pays less attention to works in the established literary canon. Furthermore, this chapter borrows the ideas from the African American criticism for the convenience of the study. Black Arts movement, Harlem Renaissance and Jazz culture are studied properly for the lucid interpretation of the proposed text.

Followed by the theoretical modality of the research, in third chapter, the researcher will analyze the text in a considerable length. It will sort out some relevant extracts from the text as the evidences to prove the hypothesis that Reed rewrites the real history of African Americans in American location.

The fourth part of this research is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the textual analysis in chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters and show Reed's attack on canonical historicity in *Mumbo Jumbo*. It will also show the treatment of issues of Harlem Renaissance, Jazz culture, myth, mystery and Black cultural heritage in the text in nutshell.

Being the postmodern novel, *Mumbo Jumbo* can have multiple layers of interpretations. Through this research a new dimension can be added to the field of interpretation of this text because this research attempts to understand the novel as an attack on established custom and value of historicity valorized by the so-called centripetal and monoglossic western canon.



## **II. Cultural Studies, Culture and Iconoclasm**

### **Introduction**

Manifested amidst the turmoil of the late 1950s and the early 1960s by Richard Hoggard and Raymond Williams, the discipline/approach cultural studies is difficult to define as such for it has no referent to which we can point. It is a set of practices constituted by the language games. It is not a tightly coherent unified movement with fixed agenda but a loosely connected group of tendencies, issues and questions. Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary or post disciplinary field of inquiry which explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning. According to Graff and Robbins,

The aim of cultural criticism is something more than preserving, transmitting and interpreting culture or cultures. Rather, the aim is to bring together, in a common democratic space of discussion, diversities that had remained unequal largely because they had remained apart. (434-35)

Cultural studies, in this sense, means a refusal of the universality of culture which the western mainstream has claimed. Cultural studies does not speak with one voice and it can't be spoken with one voice. Regarding its diversities, Womack writes,

Cultural studies manifests itself in a wide array of interpretative dimensions, including such intersecting fields of inquiry as gender studies, post colonialism, race and ethnic studies [. . .] the politics of nationalism, popular culture, postmodernism and historical criticism, among a variety of other topics. (243)

Those fields that focus on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation. Concerned with the exploration of a given culture's



aesthetic achievements, institutional structures, beliefs, systems and linguistic practices cultural studies highlights the interrelationships and tensions that exist between cultures and their effects upon both the literary works and the authentic texts of our lives. Cultural studies not only explores the cultural codes of a given work but also investigates the institutional, linguistic, historical and sociological forces that inform the work's publication and critical receptions.

Cultural studies is, and always has been, a multi or post disciplinary field of inquiry which blurs the boundaries between itself and other subjects. There must be something at stake in cultural studies which differentiates itself from other subject areas. According to Barker, "What is at stake in cultural studies' connections to matters of power and politics" (5). In this regard cultural studies tends towards the connection of 'power' and 'politics'. "Cultural studies", as argued by Chris Barker, "Is a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice" (5). Centrality of power, in this sense, is pervading every level of social relationship. Lawrence Grosberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler emphasize that the intellectual promise of cultural studies lies in its attempt to "cut across diverse social and political interests and address many of the struggles within the current scene" (1). Cultural studies in this point transcends the confines of particular discipline such as literary criticism or history.

Since cultural studies denies the separation of 'high' and 'low' or 'elite' and 'popular' culture, it tends to be overtly political in its orientation because cultural critics see themselves as "opposition" to the power structure of society and:

[t]hey question inequalities within power structures . . . and seek to restructure relationships among dominant and subordinated cultures.



Because meaning and individual subjectivity are culturally constructed, they can thus be reconstructed. (Wilfred L. Guerin et al. 241)

Cultural studies, taken to an extreme, denies the autonomy of the individual, either person or work of literature. Centrality of the concept of power is regarded as pervading every level of social relationship in the cultural studies. "Power", according to Barker, "is not simply the glue that holds the social together, or coercive force which subordinates one set of people to another, though its centrality is this, but the processes that generate and enable any form of social action, relationship or order" (10).

Such notion of power is similar to Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', closely related to cultural studies, which implies a situation where a 'historical block' of powerful groups exercise social authority and leadership over subordinate groups through the winning of consent. So, such a discipline/an approach called cultural studies has the centrality of the Foucauldian concept of nexus between 'truth' and 'power' to which Foucault claims, "'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth" (Adams 1145).

Though Foucault tries to define culture in relation to the 'discourse' created by the nexus between truth and power, Raymond Williams, a notable cultural critic sets the term 'structures of feeling' which are concerned with 'meaning' and values as they are lived and felt'. Structures of feeling are often antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and belief, and to the dominant ideologies within a society. As Peter Berry posits his view on structures of feeling:

They are characteristically found in literature and they oppose the status quo . . . The result is the cultural materialism is much more



optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing at times to see literature as a source of oppositional values. Cultural materialism particularly involves using the past to 'read' the present, revealing the politics of our own society by what we choose to emphasize or suppress of the past. (184)

In this sense, cultural materialism tries to point out the oppositional values prevalent in literature and since literature is the outcome of socio-political and cultural basis of the contemporary society, it is the subject position of cultural studies.

It is hard to define cultural studies mostly because the word "culture" is notoriously hard to pin down, according to Raymond Williams. Cultural studies is not a discreet "approach" at all, rather a set of practices. As Patrick Brantlinger points out, cultural studies is not "a highly coherent, unified movement with a fixed agenda," but a "loosely coherent group of tendencies, issues and questions" (ix).

As a field of study, cultural studies has had important effects on the study of literature. It has challenged the idea of canonical literature and affected the way literary texts are theorized and read. It has introduced cross and interdisciplinary perspectives. Cultural studies looks at literary text in relation to cultural institution, cultural history and other cultural forms, texts and practices. According to Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, cultural studies "questioned undifferentiated notions of mass culture, problematized assumptions about passive audiences and subjected popular culture to more rigorous and sophisticated modes of analysis" concerning with "questions of subjectivity, identity, social meanings, values and power" (246). Cultural studies challenges the theoretical and methodological narrowness of traditional disciplines and it is also the content previlized within canonical literary traditions, art history, history, and social science discipline.



Since cultural studies is overtly political phenomenon in its orientation and it tries to explore the voice of margin by speaking for the minority and ethnic culture which has long been dominated from the mainstream canonical misrepresentation and misconception to historicize the culture of those groups, it is "listening to the voices' at all levels" (Green 50). Cultural studies equally pays attention towards the culture, tradition and history of the African American people in that they are marginal and minority in American location. Valorizing the cultural richness and exploring the historical consent of African American ethnic group, cultural studies does justice to that group. Richard Johnson traces that "all social practices can be looked at from a cultural point of view, for the work they do, subjectively" and he defines cultural studies as the study of "historical forms of consciousness and subjectivity" (qtd. in Storey 2). Cultural studies insists that culture's importance derives from the fact that it helps to constitute the structure and shape of history. As Williams makes clear, history and culture are not "separate entities." It is never a question of reading a text against its historical background, or using the text to illustrate an already formulated account of a historical moment – "history and texts are inscribed in each other and are embedded together as a part of a same process" (qtd. in Storey 3).

The proposition from these observations can be drawn as that cultural studies refers to a multi-stranded and cross-disciplinary intellectual movement that places cultural analysis in the context of social formations seeing society and culture as historical processes unlike frozen artifacts, emphasizing the inextricable relations between culture and power and calling attention to social inequalities, thus always making a committed call for egalitarianism.

Human history and culture constitute a complex arena of dynamic forces of which we can construct only a partial subjective picture. Both fields share the belief



that "individual human subjectivity (selfhood) develops in a give-and-take relationship with its cultural milieu: while we are constrained within the limits set for us by our culture, we may struggle against those limits or transform them" (Tyson 292). Both fields are interdisciplinary or anti-disciplinary, for both argue that human experience, which is the stuff of human history and culture, can not be adequately understood by means of academic disciplines that carve it up into such artificially separated categories as sociology, literature and so forth. Since cultural criticism heavily relies upon the propositions of contextualization of history it is not always distinguishable from New Historicism.

One of the prominent and key endeavor of cultural studies is the study of culture. The concept of culture is key to cultural studies, yet there is no 'correct' or definitive meaning attached to it. While describing culture as "one of the two or three most complicated words in English languages," Williams (qtd. in Hawthorn 63) indicates the contested character of culture and cultural studies. Giving the definition of culture, Barker writes:

Culture is not 'out there' waiting to be correctly described by theorists who keep getting it wrong. rather the concept of culture is a tool which is of more or less usefulness to us as a life form. Consequently, its usage and meanings continue to change as thinkers have hoped to 'do' different things with it. We should ask not what culture 'is' but how the language and culture is used and for what purposes. (35)

Because of the multiplicity of its referents and the vagueness of study with which it has all too often been invoked, the term culture has by now acquired a certain aura of ill-repute in socio-anthropological circles. Culture is a fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret, experience and guide their actions. Such actions, then,



take the forms of social structure and network of social relations that actually exist.

Culture and social structure are, two different abstractions from the same phenomena.

"Culture"

[i]s thus best understood as defining the realm of human choices in (potentially) definable contexts, choices of individuals and collectives as potentially self-aware agents. It is in effect a field of practices, a field constituted in part by the assumptions, values, and beliefs that accompany the actions of social agents. (Mohanty 137)

Etymologically, the word 'culture' was derived from the Latin word 'cultura' as a noun of process connected to growing crops, that is, cultivation. Subsequently, the idea of cultivation was broadened to encompass the human mind or 'spirit' giving rise to the idea of the cultivated or cultured person. The idea of culture as "a whole way of life" emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (qtd. in Graff and Robins 421). Matthew Arnold described culture as "the best that has been known and thought in the world" (qtd. in Said, *Culture* xiii). Culture as the form of human 'civilization' is to be counterpoised to the 'anarchy of the raw and 'uncultivated masses'. Along Arnoldian line, famous English anthropologist F.B. Taylor defined culture as the "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (qtd. in Mitchell 45). In this sense, Taylor seems more original in his definition of culture.

Culture has undergone a massive change by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Raymond Williams contrasts this anthropological meaning of culture with the normative meaning of culture. "Culture." Williams writes "was made into an entity, a positive body of achievements and habits, precisely to express a mode of living superior to that being brought about by the progress of civilization" (254). Out of this conflict



between culture in the anthropological sense "the whole way of living of people" and the culture in the normative sense, representation of the organic voice of the people, there emerged a third way of using the term, "one that refers neither to people's organic way of life, nor to the normative values preached by leading intellectuals but to a battleground of social conflicts and contradictions" (Graff and Robbins 421). Thus, the term "culture" itself is dissonant. So, to draw a single central culture rendering individual experience in coherent and meaningful way is almost impossible.

It is, thus, worthwhile to mention here that there is no monolithic and logocentric way to view culture. Since, there is the variation of people's 'way of living' there is the existence of pluralistic and multiple culture. But the western vision to trace 'culture' is one sided, bias and hierarchical in that western metaphysics sees only the western culture to fulfill the premises of 'culture' and any other cultures are, in the view of the westerners, either barbaric or very rough and ugly.

Western iconic vision of unified central culture was challenged after the generating consciousness of the people of non-western because those people and writers started to valorize their own civilizational culture over western logocentrism. It led towards the counter-cultural and multi-cultural basis to pave the way for the equal importance of regional culture. Since then, the territory of culture has been extended widely and it is still in the procedure of continuation. The iconoclastic paradigms are still on work to dismantle the iconodulistic paradigm to view culture.

Iconoclasm, spiritually, was a movement in the Eastern Church that challenged the traditional use and symbolic significance of icons or pictures of religious figures such as Christ and saints. Etymologically, the word iconoclast is derived from Greek and it consists of two words Eickon (image) + Klastes (breaker). So, an iconoclast is a breaker of icons or of images or an opponent of their religious



use. Thus, iconoclasm is a practice of breaking the religious significance associated with the icons or images. "The iconoclastic controversy arose partly because of a genuine desire to illuminate practices capable of deteriorating into superstitious usage and partly because the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire - - - had a marked antipathy to the representation of divinity in any material mediums" according to Chambers (105).

Even though, the movement 'iconoclasm' has close affinity with the religious values, it, in this research, will basically mean the dismantling of the 'icons' of western culture and history to foreground the culture and history of the black people. So, the religious orientation of the movement 'iconoclasm' transforms, in this research, as the political movement to attack the logocentric, monolithic and biased observation done from the western convention to view history and culture of the African American people. The so called established 'truth' of canon to view the African American culture and civilization as barbaric and lack of 'culture' is shattered vehemently through the depiction of the 'real' culture and eradication of the African American people from the origin of the culture and civilization to the present context.

Since iconoclasm is a practice aiming at destroying the halo of veneration placed around icons or images, it is unconventional and counter-traditional in nature. It breaks the established canonical tradition by shedding light upon the marginal and minority voices, cultures and history. According to Christian iconography, use of visual symbols can be exploited advantageously for making religious instruction effective and fruitful. Iconoclasts go against this idea and are bent on shattering the halo given to the images, conceptions. By extension, anybody who turns his back to socially accepted values, be they whether cultural or religious, is an iconoclast.



There is the close relationship between counterculture and iconoclasm because both of them try to dismantle and counter attack the established 'icons' of the canonical society. Instead of fanatically supporting the customs and values of the established mainstream practice, both counterculturalists and iconoclasts attack the misconception and the dogma created by such practice. Valorization of popular culture, history of the margin and the ethnic groups attack the iconodulistic practice. Therefore, iconoclasm is a practice of shattering and rejecting the value or significance attached to certain images or icons and it is countercultural in character.

### **African American Literary and Cultural Criticism: Dismantling the 'Icons' of Historicity**

Being one of the component part of the cultural studies, African American criticism foregrounds the history and culture of African American people which are placed as margin in western logocentrism. It paves attention towards the African American 'way of life' valorizing the significance and richness and African American culture over the so called unified western culture. It also attacks the false generalizations created by the westerners in their history book to view African American culture.

In a culture whose dominant historical voice has been white, there is a vital need for African Americans to present their lives as of equal importance in the 'American story'. African American criticism tries to fulfill this need of equality and inclusion by paying due attention towards the marginalized African American voice. As Werner Sollors writes, 'For this reason, what is called 'memory' . . . may become a form of counterhistory that challenges the false generalizations in exclusionary 'history'" (8). African American voices actively express 'memory', as Sollors refers to it, present 'counterhistories' to resist the tendency to exclude, and articulate African



American identities to break the imposed 'silence' inherited from slavery and perpetuated in the written history and social frameworks of the USA.

African American criticism, in this point, transcends the confines of the historicity weaved by the western metaphysics being iconoclastic on the limited created western vision to view African American culture and history shedding light upon the dynamic quality of the contest between 'silence' and 'voice' in African American culture which has been integral to the wider struggle for political power and authority in the United States. This concept of 'expressive voices' takes a variety of forms: slave songs, autobiography, fiction, political speech, music and film, but together they create an alternative mode of communication through which African Americans state their own culture and assert their difference whilst positioning themselves alongside the often more dominant voices of white mainstream culture. These 'repositories of individual memories, taken together, create a collective communal memory (Fabre & O'Meally 9) that represent the black counterhistorical identity. According to Manning Marable, this "identity is not something our oppressors forced upon us. It is a cultural and ethnic awareness we have collectively constructed for ourselves over hundreds of years. This identity is a cultural umbilical cord connecting us with Africa" (295).

The exclusion of African American history and culture from official versions of American culture and history paved way for the African American cultural criticism to struggle for the inclusion and equality of African American culture and history foregrounding the richness and nobleness than western culture. The typical features and circumstances of African American culture valorize this culture over western culture. It is simply because of the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of black culture from the mouthpiece of the canonical white conceptions, black culture



was regarded as the inferior and barbaric. As Tyson states, "the tremendous outpouring of black literature, philosophy, art and music associated with Harlem during the 1920s . . . were not given the attention they deserved" (381) by the western logocentric canon. So, in order to response the misrepresentation of African literary and cultural enigma, African American criticism emerged and it dismantles the 'halo' or 'aura' created by the master narrative to view African American culture and history.

African American writing displays a folkloric conception of human kind, an ambivalent consciousness arising from bicultural identity; irony, parody, and sometimes bitter comedy in negotiating this ambivalence; attacks on white cultural superiority; and a focus on survival including language games. These practices symbolically characterize "the group's attempt to humanize the world" in order to survive according to Ralph Ellison (qtd. in Bell xvi, 19). Ellison points to evidence of a willingness to trust experience and one's own definition of reality rather than allow one's masters "to define these crucial matters." Folklore was what "black people had before they knew there was such a thing as art" (173). In reviewing the primary features of African American writing, Bernard bell turns to history:

Traditional white American values emanate from providential vision of history and of Euro-Americans as a chosen people, a vision that sanctions their individual and collective freedom in the pursuit of property, profit and happiness. Radical Protestantism, constitutional democracy, and industrial capitalism are the white American trinity of values. In contrast, black American values emanate from a psychical, Judeo-Christian vision of history, and of African Americans as a disinherited, colonized people, a vision that sanctions their resilience of spirit and pursuit of social justice. (Guerien et al. 257)



As Bell stresses, it is such a distinction between white American values and black American values which differentiate African American history and culture from mainstream emphasizing the uniqueness of African American values. No other ethnic or cultural group in America has shared anything like the experience of American blacks: Africa, the transatlantic or middle passage, slavery, Southern Plantation traditions, emancipation, reconstruction, post-reconstruction, Northern migration, urbanization and racism (Bell 5). It is because of such type of experience experienced by African American people in America, there emerged the sense of resistance and it ultimately paved way for the rebellion for the emancipation.

Since African American literary and cultural criticism valorizes socio-political and cultural scenario of the African American community, equally pays attention towards the assertion of identity in American location. It resists the master control over the formation of identity of black Americans and foregrounds the sense of rebellion from 'silence' to 'voice' or 'speech'. As bell hooks puts it:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of 'talking black' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice. (Mariani 340)

The 'heritage of slavery', which forms the basis of African American identity in American location, in African American culture on the positioning of people of color within a framework of values dominated by the mainstream culture of whites who tended to assume the slave was "a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which the white man could write what he chose" (Levine 52).



The 'master culture' like the master of the plantation who sought to rule the lives of the slaves, tried to impose its norms and values on the minority group who were derided because of their color and an inherited European view of the African as barbaric heathen and inferior.

The African was . . . defined as an inferior human being. The representation of the African as 'other' signified phenotypical and cultural characteristics as evidence of the inferiority and attributed condition of Africans therefore constituted the measure of European progress and civilization. (Miles 30)

Defining the African within these limits of representation meant the power and status of the master were increased since the slave acted as an 'other' or a mirror against which the whites measured themselves and their value system and to assume the inferiority of the African thus bolstered the power of the whites. The master/slave system was grounded in denials: of black history, identity, humanity, community, knowledge and language. These were all seen as means through which slaves might assert themselves and ultimately questions their condition in relation to the dominant group. To deny or erase these was, therefore, a method of control, a device to deny the slaves' identity and history and enforce an impression of being adrift, worthless and devoid of ancestry.

In 1965, during the struggle for civil rights, James Baldwin echoed many of these ideas when he wrote:

It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you . . . was taught in American history books that Africa had no history and neither did I. I



was a savage about whom the least said the better. You belonged  
where white people put you. (404)

It is because of the generating consciousness of the African Americans about their positioning of American location, African American writing sought to construct a place in America for the black man and to defy being positioned by 'challenging the white world's assumptions' (Baldwin 31) which tends to be the basic assumption/premise of African American criticism: "The truth about a black man, as a historical entity and as a human being, has been hidden from him, deliberately and cruelly; the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions" (qtd. in American Cultural Studies 76).

Such awareness leads to the struggle for existence and identity out of the misrepresentation positioned by western people to view African American culture and history. In this regard, African American criticism encompasses iconoclastic arena against western metaphysics disclosing the situation of African American people and valorizing the culture and history and its richness. It is iconoclastic in that it brings the sense of what George Lipsitz calls "counter-memory' which he explains' not just a rejection of history, but a reconstitution of it' (227) in response to the constructed history of the western monolithicism. He further says counter memory as

a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives, that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter memory starts with the particular and then builds . . . [it] looks to the past for hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives . . . [and] forces revision . . . by supplying new perspectives. (213)



Such counter memory emanates the bottom line of African American literary and cultural criticism which centralizes the study terrain of African American culture and history instead of totalized and so-called unified western history and culture. In African American literature also, there can be seen the demonstration of imaginative reconstruction of black history, using literature to tell 'a whole unrecorded history'. As Michelle Wallace has written:

We must choose to recount and recollect the negativity, the discount, the loss. In the process, we may, ultimately make a new kind of history that first recalls how its own disciplinary discourse was made in brutality and exclusion, and second a history that seeks as its starting point the heterogeneity of the present. (Mariani 139)

It is because of the counter attack towards the false generalizations created by the whites, African American literature serves the iconoclastic arena challenging the mainstream voice to view African American history and culture.

From the propositions mentioned above with the key notion of the scholars, it is worthwhile to conclude with the remark that African American literary and cultural criticism, being one of the remarkable component of cultural studies, pays attention towards the African American voices which were placed as margin by the canonical mainstream literary and cultural practice. Because of the long term negligence and misrepresentation African American history and culture could not get its own aura in mainstream location which African American criticism dismantles and dislocates. It foregrounds the cultural richness and historical importance of African American people placing their African heritage and civilization at the center of interpretation and analysis. Thus it pays iconoclastic notion on canonical fanaticism and dogma, and created 'truth' by the logocentric practice.



## **Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Culture and Black Arts Movement: Attack on Canonical Culture and History**

Since the history of hitherto existing African American society is the history of subjugation, suppression, exploitation and the continuous struggle for the liberation from the misrepresentation, during the formation of African American identity in American location, movements such as Harlem renaissance, Jazz culture and Black Arts movement tried to focalize African American culture and history responding to the mainstream logocentrism.

Harlem renaissance, a literary and cultural movement of 1920s and 1930s, was centered in Harlem. Harlem renaissance, in the view of Lois Tyson, "Illustrate(s) most clearly the political motives that lay behind the exclusion of African American from American history" (381). It is due to the thorough subjugation from the white mainstream monolithicism, Harlem renaissance appeared as literary, cultural and political upheaval to place African American into the realm of equality, justice and fraternity which has long been dominated by whites. Regarding the Harlem renaissance and the development of negritude, Hans Bertens writes:

Harlem Renaissance and the development of negritude mark the beginnings of African American and African . . . self definition in the face of a western racism and of a western system of colonial oppression that had denied (and continued to deny) substance and validity to non-white cultures and cultural expressions, all of which were considered far inferior to the great achievements of western culture. Inevitably, that process of self-definition involves a critique of western representations that repeat the stereotypes for their legitimization. (105)



Regarded as "a literary and intellectual movement" as well as "an attitude or state of mind" that was influenced by politics aesthetics, urbanization, and institutions (Mitchell 495), Harlem renaissance serves as the basis for African American literary and cultural criticism for it denounces the dogmatic concept of western canon formation and celebrates the African American culture and heritage. It is on the interest of black culture as Wilfred L. Guerien says:

The Harlem renaissance was the tremendous upsurge of interest in black culture and especially primitivism that occasioned another return to the folkloristic sources of African American writing. The so called "New Negro" celebrated and affirmed black culture and reexamined sources in Africa. (259)

Thus, Harlem renaissance, as a movement, explores the roots and origins of African American people in American location basing upon the literary creation foregrounding the richness and value of African American culture and history.

Followed by the premises of Harlem Renaissance, there is the secular culture of music known as Jazz which is also a typical African American culture in its origin. Because of the desire to present affirmative way of life under the mutilated identity relating to the happiness of the past, there emerged a culture of Jazz music through which African Americans could express their voices undermining the assumed totality of the west. Jazz, as Ralph Ellison traces, was "a definition of . . . identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition" (234) because it permits full creative expression of the self, in combination with others responding to their energy, but both relating to a long varied tradition of other forms of articulation.



African American secular music plays a part in the process of self-definition and the growing confidence of the African Americans in the public sphere. As Lawrence Levine writes:

Black secular song along with other forms of the oral tradition, allowed them to express themselves communally and individually, to derive great aesthetic pleasure, to perpetuate traditions, to keep values from eroding, and to begin to create new expressive modes . . . revealed a culture which kept large elements of its own autonomous standards alive, which continued a rich internal life, which interacted with a larger society that deeply affected it but to which it did not completely succumb. (297)

African American musical culture is the expression of emotion and responses located on the roots of African into an accepted mode of expression. Blues, which later on transforms into Jazz music was "a way of solidifying community and commenting on the social fabric of Black life in America" (Collins 99). Through the help of Jazz, African Americans tried to express their angst, denial to the mainstream established culture.

Jazz is the expression of African American people to which Richard King states as "the new language of public action" (11), which won the allegiance of members of those segments of the society-intellectuals, adolescents and many Negroes – who felt themselves marginal to the central framework and alienated from many of its conventional values. Jazz is not only the oral tradition of African people, rather, it is the live experience as Kenneth E. Prouty mentions: "[Jazz] is not merely oral tradition that imparts to these cultures their vitality, but rather it is their lived



experiences and the cultural expressions of their relationship to unique histories and environments" (331).

Neither "oral" nor "written" can adequately describe the complex process that have given Jazz its unique character in both performance and pedagogy, and that reflect its history of assimilating and transforming myriad musical and cultural practices.

It is, through such observations, mentionable that since Jazz musical culture is the ongoing attack on the canonicity in that it valorizes the African American musical tradition over West and it is the sole heritage and property which brings into light African American historical and cultural arena. It is, thus, iconoclastic culture against western totalized culture.

Similarly, Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, the literary and artistic offshoot of the Black Power Movement, affected the role of African American Literary critics emphasizing their job as "cultural critics." Black critics were called upon to interpret literature in terms of its representation of and relationship to political and economic situation of African Americans. "Afro American critics analyzed the ways in which literary texts undermine or reinforce the racist ideologies that have kept black Americans politically oppressed and economically disadvantaged" (Tyson 384).

Black Arts Movement also attacks the appropriateness of white critical theories for the interpretation of black literature. After all, it was a Eurocentric definition of "great" literature that marginalized black authors in American literary history and virtually excluded them from the American canon. The question of appropriateness of white theories for the interpretation of black texts remains pertinent shedding light on the white's desire "to control the critical scene." It emerged "just when the literature of people's of color . . . began to move to 'the center'" (Barbara Christian 459). As Henry Lois Gates Jr. points out, it isn't fair "to deny



(African Americans) the process of exploring and reclaiming our (cultural identity) before we critique it" (The Master's Pieces 32). Regarding the tool to interpret African American Literature, he further says: "[A]ny tool that enables the critic to explain the complex workings of the language of a text is an appropriate tool. For it is language, the black language of black texts, that expresses the distinctive quality of our literary tradition" (*Figures in Black* xxi).

The idea of distinctiveness of black literature of which Gates refers was another important issue explored during the Black Arts Movement. In opposition to the notion of the "universality" of all literature, many writers of the Black Arts Movement argued that African American Literature has its own unique qualities, its own politics and poetics, that can not be fully explained by or contained within the larger framework of European American Literature. This uniqueness derives from the African American oral tradition of storytelling, folklore and oral history, which has its roots in African culture which relates to an essential "blackness", a way of thinking, feeling and creating shared by all peoples of African descent.

In a nutshell, African American literary and cultural movements such as Harlem Renaissance, Jazz culture and Black Arts Movement make a query on canonical gaze to view African American culture, history and literature positioning the literature of the margin at the center of discussion, interpretation and analysis. These movements severely attack the existed totality of western vision which dominated for a long time the culture, tradition, history and literature of margin. Thus, these movements serve as the iconoclastic arena of historicity on the glance of logocentrism.



### III. Black Cultural History: From Myth to Politics

*Mumbo Jumbo* is Ishmael Reed's brilliantly satiric deconstruction of western civilization, a racy and uproarious commentary on African American society. In it, Reed mixes portraits of historical figures and fictional characters with sound bites on subjects ranging from ragtime to Greek philosophy. The novel is a trenchant and often biting look at black-white relations throughout the history from a keen observer of African American culture. From its title on, *Mumbo Jumbo* serves as a critique of black and western literary forms and comments, and of the complex relationships between the two.

In the iconoclastic novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed offers a revisionist viewpoint that counters all white concepts of culture. Through, humour and wit, Reed is able to refute basic constructs of the dominating white, American culture and reclaim a safe African culture. His revisionist mission on African Black history from its origin marks the paramount importance. On the cultural paradigm of African American people, which is the response to the so called master narrative from the perspective of the margin. Regarding the history of art and culture in the mythical Osirian time, Reed writes, ". . . in Egypt at the time of Osiris everyman was an artist and every artist a priest; it wasn't until later that Art became attached to the state to do with it what it pleased" (164). Thus history of the blacks is directly attached to the art which is holy thing for them.

Throughout the history of African people, there has been a tension between western values and conventions and the African cultural heritage and origin in which Reed focuses upon the marginalized and suppressed culture and history of the Black people. The culture of the black people is generally marked by the Osirian cult and norms in agricultural celebrations, "Dancing and singing, and in Egypt this rhythm



was known as the Black Mud Sound" (161). Osiris, who is the God of blacks, used to tour all over the Egypt with his musicians and their sets of decorations having to do with procreation. Enjoying themselves when there was hard work to be done, countries to invade, populations to subjugate, Egypt was prospering under Osiris and there was peace.

Since the history of the black people is the history of continuous suppression, subjugation and exploitation, from its origin, these features started to be seen when the brother of Osiris, Set tried to devaluate Osirian cult." Set was going about Egypt telling everybody that Osiris was a Freud and that he was traveling the world "drunk" and "fornicating" disgracing the name of the fatherland. Set issued a challenge which travelers brought to Osiris " (165). It was Set's attempt to overpower Osiris. By this, we can see two contradictory sets of practices established in Egypt: One is the worshipper of the music, dancing and the other is the worshiper of the Aton or monotheism because Set established his own religion based upon Aton. "By establishing his own religion based upon Aton (the sun's flaming disc) he felt he would overcome the nature religion of Osiris. He would be the reverse of Osiris who was associated with fertilization and spring, he would become Aton the "burner of growing things" (174).

Reed, in this novel, shows how Osiris was treated after dethroning from Set in the manner of reality. Since his intention is to depict the true history, he discloses the facts about what was actually going on. Set and his followers "mutilated him (Osiris) and made believe that he was torn into 14 parts by fish, and from that day forward fish have been considered evil in Egypt. On October 31<sup>st</sup> people came and saw the mutilated corpse, parts of which had been washed up on the shore, and the open coffer lying not far away" (166-67).



Though the Osirian cult was legally banned in Egypt after the overpowering of Set, it spread everywhere along with Greek to where the people of Greek "rushed out of doors and in frenzied dance raged over the countryside, singing weird songs, tearing their garment, unable to stop dancing" (18). Dionysus taught the Greeks the Osirian Art which lasted until the Atonists in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. convinced the emperor Constantine to co-sign for the cross. Dionysus taught the Greek guides to identify the nature that spoke through mankind. The Greeks established temples to these "Egyptian derived mysteries" (169) where people would go out of their heads so that the gods would take them over. The Greek and Roman masses were crazy about the Egyptian mysteries and celebrated them in the temples of Osiris and Isis. In that manner Osirian culture went on practicing everywhere.

Reed's history of the Moses story recreates the way white American envisions their religious percepts, and allows space for a clearer look at all history and culture unmarred by the Atonist's vision of life. The reader sees Moses not as the great liberator, but one who is reduced to cultural thievery. Ultimately, Moses is the slave master. Reed's iconoclastic move in the narrative allows for a revision of Judeo-Christian history that allows African culture and knowledge to be at the center rather than the periphery. The Moses narrative also establishes the historical tension between the Atonists and those of Jes Grew and its ilk, allowing Reed to root the struggle for independence in a point of reference most white Americans can understand and react for or against. Since Moses is the liar, his imitation of the black cultural conduct shaped by the black musician Jethro does not provide the sound beat of music As Reed places, "For once music wouldn't just be used as a background to dancing but he (Moses) would be a soloist and no 1 in the audience would be allowed to play a whistle or beat a drum or rattle a tambourine. The Osirians were furious. They knew



this to be an Atonist trick and decided to disrupt the concert" (182). But the dictatorship of Atonists did not provide them to dismantle the concert of Moses which was covered by flat, weak, deprived of the low down rhythm. "A man who didn't go along was taken outside and beaten with flails and crooks" (183). Thus, practice of suppression to Osirian followers was nurtured by Moses as well.

Another aspect in Reed's novel is recognizing the Loas to regain the cultural pattern. In Reed's work, a dramaturgic and oral interpretative context is consistent with animistic practice. It implies a specific mode of exegesis which starts out from the perceptible manifestation and infers from them the virtual causes, a procedure which Reed closely associates with the traditional "work" of the houngan (or Voodoo healer) who recognizes the Loas that are possessing people. Recognition is one of the most important gestures in Voodoo practices: "Houngans in Haiti as well as priests of Africa and South America are able to identify any spirit or God that possesses a person, an art the Greeks knew" (213). The context of recognition, moreover, is one of the identifying an act of possession, as the narrator of *Mumbo Jumbo* observes:

Once in a while I is possessed by a Loa. The Loa is not a diamon in the Freudian sense, a hysteric; no, the Loa is known by its signs and is fed, celebrated, drummed to until it deserts the horse and govi of its host and goes on about its business. The attendants are experienced and know the names, knowledge the West lost when the Atonists wiped out the Greek mysteries. (50)

Reed gives a good example of what is involved in such a process of recognition when he presents the case of Earline's possession. Papa LaBas's assistant has forgotten to "feed the Loas;." Her possession by Erzulie is anticipated by her unusual behaviour. She notices that "something has come over her. She finds it necessary to go through



the most elaborate toilet ritual these days . . ." (28). LaBas notices her strange walk: "She is serpentine and her hips move tantalizingly under the thin, white short dress" (51). Later, Earline takes another "Luxurious bath" after "she has brought this marvelous scarf which bears a design of a stylized heart pierced by a dagger" (53).

Reed's scarf here describes Erzulie's Ve've', a ritual drawing copied from Rigard (110). Earline's reduction of an innocent trolley car operator demonstrates the impact of possession. She is no longer herself but involves him in an affair written by a script beyond his or her own control. Erzulie also manifests herself when Earline states that "All Black men are my husbands" (121), almost a literal quotation from Hurston's description of the habits of the Voodoo love goddess" (143). When later Earline collapses after the encounter, it takes the competence of Papa LaBas and Black Herman to recognize the Loa" with the red dress on" (125-26) and save Earline. "How did you know it was me?" asks Erzulie after having been diagnosed as the cause (127). The particular *connaissance* of the two *houngans* consists in knowing the supra-individual characteristics of a loa, since loas manifest possession in different forms and personifications. Hence the art of the Pagan interpreter is his ability to find sameness in manifest variety, such as recognizing the qualities, objects, and image associations among female goddesses:

[Their] sister Isis. Fine as she could be. Firm breasts, eloquence, all of those qualities that are later to show up in her spiritual descendent Erzulie (love of mirrors, plumes, combs, an elaborate toilet) whom we in the United States call the girl with the red dress on. (Bessie Smith and Josephine Baker are 2 Aspects of Erzulie) (162)

Thus a *houngan* has to know the characteristic traits of a Loa in order to recognize the "name" to regain cultural pattern, the principle at work. Actually Reed invites the



reader to apply this knowledge when Set instructs Moses about what presents to bring Isis. The very items reveal the Egyptian goddess's relatedness to Erzulie and Voodoo practice – "brightly coloured scarves and liquors, jewelry and delicate chickens for her to eat" (181).

*Mumbo Jumbo* rotates around the missing text *The Book of Thoth* which has the affinity to black cultural history and heritage from the Osirian culture. However, the text remains not only missing but unreadable as well. The absent text does more than question LaBas's ability as a reader; as Labas's history of the Book of Thoth suggests, the text's absence questions the entire notions of textuality held by the west. According to LaBas, the Book comes into being when, following multiple Jes Grew "Outbreaks" throughout Egypt, Thoth goes to Osiris and suggests that "if Osiris would execute these dance steps" for him "he would illustrate him." Importantly, Thoth's intention is not to restrict Jes Grew's future forms, rather he envisions a "book of Litanies to which people . . . could add their own variations" (164). As Lock recognizes, "Thoth's book uses the inscribed image illustratively rather than deterministically. It is also clear that the book is to be regarded as an indeterminate process rather than a determinate product" (56-57). The indeterminate nature of the Book makes little sense to the Atonists, who demand definitive interpretations. Thus while the Atonists recognize that Jes Grew can not be contained through force, they still assume that it can be defined by its text, locked into its Logos.

LaBas's history of *The Book of Thoth* actually includes an anecdotal warning against such a misreading. In his version of the story of Moses, LaBas tells of Mose's question for the text as a means of gaining power in Egypt. Upon visiting the temple of Osiris and Isis in Koptos, Moses actually does gain access to the text, or a version of it, and leaves feeling that he has "gotten it all down. All down. Had it down pat"



(182). However, when Moses later performs the "words of the Book of Thoth" for the people of Egypt, instead of bringing life to the crowd or inspiring the Egyptian masses to worship him, the songs actually cause their ears to bleed. The work, which previously sparked life, in this instance turns destructive. This results not only because Moses misuses the Text for his own, power hungry ends, but equally because Moses has mistakenly assumed that such a text can be gotten "down pat" in the first place. He approaches the text as if there exists but one determine reading, or signification. By contrast, the Neo-Hoodoo perspective views the Book as a work in progress, like the Osiris tale, kept alive through variation and improvisation. Notably, the music of the Osirians who attend Mose's concert, though they "didn't know the work that Moses knew", has the effect Moses seeks: it causes the people to break out in dance (185). The text itself, then, is not so crucial as the Atonists might presume, for Jes Grew seeks its expression, not its confinement in a definitive reading.

PaPa LaBas's own quest for the text, in fact, places too much emphasis on the object itself and even seems counter intuitive in that, according to the Atonists, to control the text means the death of Jes Grew. LaBa's own flaw is that he is "a bit too rigid." Herman advises LaBas to "Improvise some. Open up, PaPa. Stretch on out with it" (130). Herman recognizes that Jew Grew does not aim to definite its parameters through its text, but rather to stretch the limits of the Atonist culture it disrupts. Buddy Jackson, a Herlem gangster and Grand master of the African Lodge #1, suggests that the text itself, in its empirically evident form at least, is in fact, of little significance. While Jackson and his men learned of H.V.V's possession of "a black sacred book" (194), Jackson is the anonymous J.G.C. who collects and gives the anthology to Abdul-unlike those who ardently hunt the Text, they claim they "didn't care" about the Text. Jackson explains, "we had invented our own texts and slang"



(194), meaning the text's absence does not close the book on signification, but actually opens a gap in which Jes Grew can continue to signify indefinitely ironically, then, Jes Grew's "dissolution" allows it to live on, to remain unbound, a mystery open to future manifestations and interpretations.

Indeed, Jes Grew does not meet its final demise at the close of the Harlem Renaissance. As LaBas recognizes, "Jes Grew has no end and no beginning . . . They will try to depress Jes Grew but it will only spring back and prosper. We will make our own future text. A future generation of young artists will accomplish this" (204). *Mumbo Jumbo* itself can, in fact, be regarded as Reed's contribution to this "future text" and a product of Jes Grew which is the spirit of blackness overtaking, America by its African cultural traits: "the manic in the artist who would rather do glossolalia than be 'neat clean and lucid'" (211). That is to say, against the backdrop of the "neat clean and lucid" novel and its adherence to rational explanation and definitive closure, Reed's open ended, multi-textual, polvocal "glossolalia" calls attention to its own unsolvability.

To wrap up, Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* discloses the history of African origin to the present context serving as the bridge to add the mythological saga of Osirian religion to the political scenario in African-American location formed as Jes Grew and its detection. Presenting such facts and facets, Reed pulls into the center of discussion about the culture of Black people which has still been marginalized in the canonical western metaphysics. Reed's attempt, here, is to foreground the cultural history of the Black people and its survival despite the continuous suppression, subjugation and exploitation. Since culture is a unique phenomenon of a society, it can be survived even in domination and suppression. His closing of the novel reversing the chronology of the narrative, which begins in the '20s and ends some fifty



years later, by summarizing LaBas's history in reverse, starting with his activities during the '60s and counting backward to the 20s, which the novel claims "were back again." In short, "time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around" (218). Such temporal circularity undermines the logic of the entire western notion of time and history, upon which the Atonist claim to "truth" relies. Thus, Reed's novel does not focus on the whodunit but rather takes aim at the history of racial oppression, exploring, the possibility of "undoing" and revitalizing those who have suffered.

### **Jes Grew: Symbolic Representation of Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Culture**

African American literary and cultural movements such as Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Culture and Black Arts Movement make a query on canonical gaze to view African American culture, history and literature positioning the literature of the margin at the center of discussion, interpretation and analysis. These movements severely attack the existed totality of western vision which dominated for a long time the culture, tradition, history and literature of margin. In Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, the placement of Jes Grew symbolically marks the traits of these movements where black culture is celebrated and placed into center unlike the canonical drives of western vision.

Jes Grew, the symbolic representation of political as well as cultural movements of African American, has wrongly been defined by white canonical norms represented by Wallflower order, which is the army of Atoniosts, paralleling it into a disease named as "plague". Reed puts forward his point to this claim that "but they did not understand that Jes Grew epidemic was unlike physical plagues. Actually Jes Grew was an anti-plague . . . Jes Grew enlivened the host . . . but Jes Grew is electric as life and is characterized by ebullience and ecstasy. . . is the delight of the gods" (6).



Reed begins *Mumbo Jumbo* with the flare-up of the plague/anti-plague, Jes Grew. While the Jes Grew epidemic fuels the narrative of the story, it also provides a concrete answer to the feelings of displacement of African history and culture for those who catch it." On the surface Jes Grew appears to be the amoral destructive, force the wallflowers would have the world believe it is. Fueled by dancing, music and other arts, Jes Grew is the act of reclamation. The anti-plague spreads as people begin to believe in their own rhythms and meters-their own history and culture. Jes Grew's efficacy is its organic origin and experience. When the poet Nathan Brown asks Benoit Battraville (A Haitian Voodoo Priest) to teach him how to catch Jes Grew, Benoit responds:

O . . . I think you ought to ask PaPa LaBas and Black Herman. You see the Americans do not know the names of the long and tedious list of deities and rites as we know them . . . They know this process for they have synthesized the Hoodoo of Voodoo. Its blee blop essence; they've isolated the unknown factor which gives Loas their rise. Ragtime. Jazz. Bleus. The new thang. That talk you drum from your lips. Your style . . . So don't ask me how to catch Jes Grew. Ask Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, your poets, your painters, your musicians , ask them how to catch it . . . (151)

Benoit continues to define Jes Grew through its symptoms, learning Brown in the overwhelming sense of Jes Grew until he has "finally caught-on". More than Brown's infection; however, Benoit's answer provides the reader with the origins of Jes Gew, linking to the VooDoo of Haiti, the HooDoo of PaPa LaBas, and more importantly, the African heritage. By telling Brown to look to the artists for Jes Grew, Benoit places emphasis on African American cultural creatures, whose works are



reclamations of the past and the possibilities for the future. Jes Grew is a virulent force that is the spirit and culture of a Pan-African re-envisionment within the white United States. No wonder it causes such drastic reactions from the Atonists against their own culture such as assassinating the president or crashing the stock market. Jes Grew is the Black American way of reclaiming the history of African and its cultural aura which has its unique identity in the form of music and politics.

Jes Grew's one limitation, however, is its lack of tangibility or text, as Reed puts it. Throughout the book, the Wallflower's main goal is to keep the book that outlines the true history and culture of Jes Grew from mass circulation. They ultimately succeed, squashing Jes Grew yet again. Fittingly, Jes Grew's book finds destruction through the character of Abdul. The Muslim prophesizes the future of Jes Grew by saying:

A new generation is coming on the scene. They will use terms like 'nitty gritty', 'for real', 'where it's at', and use words like 'basic' and 'really' with telling emphasis. They will extend the letter and the meaning of the word 'bad'. They won't use your knowledge and they will call you 'sick' and 'way out' and that will be a sad day, but we must prepare for it. For on that day they will have abandoned the other world they came there with and will have be commundanists pragmatists and concretists. They will shout loudly about soul because they will have lost it. And their protests will be a shirek. A panic sound. That's just the way it goes, brother. (39)

By destroying his manuscript, Abdul fulfills his prophesy. The future generation's lack of faith will be a direct result of not having a legitimized source that justifies Jes Grew to their increasingly critical eyes. Abdul laments this rejection, but also accepts



it as inevitable, never knowing he will be the cause. PaPa LaBas condemns Abdul's actions by saying:

Censorship until the very last. He took it upon himself to decide what writing should be viewed by Black people he claimed he loved. I can't understand. Apparently after Abdul burned the Book, Jes Grew sensed the ashes of its writings, its litany and just withered up and died. Better Luck next time. (203)

What becomes important though is not the loss of book, but the idea that the culture of Jes Grew needs more than an organic, spiritual following. It needs a recognizable, tangible location or text that grounds its ideas and ideals into a fixed reality away from the white norm.

Reed's positioning of Jes Grew as the symbolic manifestation of Black consciousness towards their culture is prevalent everywhere in the novel. In order to grasp the spirit of awareness of Blacks through Jes Grew, Reed takes the help of Harlem Renaissance. According to Reed, "For if Jazz age is year for year the Essences and symptoms of the times, then Jes Grew is the germ making it rise yeast like across the American plain" (20). In this sense, Jes Grew is the germ of black cultural consciousness which is rising day by day into the black community in 1920s. Since dancing is the spirit of Jes Grew and it has been arised from the thousands of years, LaBas, the principle character of the novel and VooDoo detective was well as black historian says to Abdul, "we've been dancing for 1000s of years, Abdul" (34). This shows the musical affinity of the black culture clearly.

Jes Grew, the spirit of blackness in the world of 1920s America, is the migration, the flow that can not be controlled and restricted; it creeps across the supposedly variegated American landscape, defying all logocentric boundaries and



valorizing the black cultural anathema; it "knows no class no race no consciousness" (5). In other words, it disregards all Atonist's social demarcation regarding both the subject and the space the subject inhabits. And as we have seen, Jes Grew refuses to be placed into a box or in a determinative text. Rather, Ges Grew moves as it in a smooth space, challenging categorizing limits that the state wishes to impose. For example when Warren Harding had said "Let's End Wiggle and Wooble. But Jes Grew was wiggling wobbling rambling and shambling ringing and chaining. Up Down. Any which-a-way. Couples were marathon dancing until they fainted in 1 another's arms" (139). This indicates to the Jazz cultural movement of the 1920s by which blacks sought their cultural freedom. Again Jes Grew's transgression of the clearly demarcated space of the state is met with swift and militant efforts to reproduce a more limited space that would restrict future flows. But the Atonists have set out to "capture" what ultimately cannot be captured. The solution the Atonists assume is to replace the "manic" with the "lucid" by confining Jes Grew to its text, or to the Atonist version of textuality which does not open up meaning but restricts it to one reading, in effect killing it by preempting future signification. Jes Grew, however, lives on beyond the text, or outside the striating lines of Atonists' spatial production.

Jes Grew's conviction on dancing and music can be seen in the text. It represents the black cultural identity and richness. Reed's tracing of the following lines from the Joost A.M. Meerloo highlights this thing:

Dance is the universal art, the common joy of expression. Those who cannot dance are imprisoned in their own ego and cannot live well with other people and the world. They have lost the tune of life. They only live in cold thinking. Their feelings are deeply repressed while they attack themselves forlornly to the earth. (60)



Reed's valorization of dance is clearly depicted in this excerpt. Since music and dance have the close affinity to the 1920s Jazz culture, and it is carried out by Jes Grew, hence Jes Grew can be the symbolic representation of Jazz culture. Since Jes Grew celebrates the Black cultural panorama, it is also the symbolic representation of whole black cultural identity and heritage. Reed's placement of the Jazz culture on the heart of Jes Grew is seen:

UPON HEARING ETHEL WATERS SING "THAT DA-DA-  
STRAIN" AND A JAZZ BAND PLAY "PAPA DE-DA-DA"  
EUROPEAN PAINTERS TAKE JES GREW ABROAD. IT HAS  
BECOME WHAT THE WALLFLOWER ORDER FEARED:  
PANDEMIC. . . WORLD-WIDE MU'TAFIKAH GIVE JES GREW  
ENCOURAGEMENT BY PUTTING IT UP TAKING IT IN AND  
HIDING IT OUT . . . ON WALL STREET SAXOPHONES MAKE A  
STRONG RALLY WHILE VIOLINS ARE DOWN . . .  
OUTBREAKS OF JES GREW 60 MILES FROM NEW YORK CITY.  
(105)

Thus the valorization of African culture and heritage is through Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo* by which Reed symbolically represents the Jazz culture in American location. On the other hand, *Mumbo Jumbo* can be the political representation carrying the spirit of Harlem Renaissance which is a remarkable movement that illustrates the political motives that lay behind the exclusion of African American from American history. It is the movement of black cultural retrieval to which Reed cites:

Harlem ! . . . the city that Never  
Sleeps ! . . . A strange, Exotic island in  
the heart of New York ! Rent parties ! . . .



Number runners ! Chippies . . . Jazz love !

. . . primitive passion ! (99)

Jes Grew, though the fictitious creation of Ishmael Reed, fulfills the premises of Harlem renaissance in that it focuses on the 1920s political scenario of the American location. "Jes Grew", in the words of Johnson, a character in *Mumbo Jumbo* "was the manic in the artist who would rather do glossolalia than be 'neat clean or lucid'. Jes Grew, the despised enemy of the Atonist path, those Left-handed practitioners of the Petro Loa, those too faut to spring from sharp edges, wiggle, jiggle go all the way down and come up shaking" (211). As the political term, Jes Grew undermined the Atonist notion of self, history and culture and tried to reshape the definition of history and culture confusing even the Atonists. For this political motive, Jes Grew takes the help of black culture located in music and dancing. As Reed puts it with the evidence of James Weldon Johnson, "The Blues is a Jes Grew as James Weldon Johnson surmised. Jazz was a Jes Grew which followed the Jes Grew of Ragtime. Slang is Jes Grew too" (214). With this remarkable quotation of PaPa LaBas to the students of history, I can conclude that Jes Grew is the life force of African American which represents political, cultural, spiritual and social belief of blacks.

To conclude, Jes Grew is the symbolic representation of Harlem Renaissance and Jazz culture which valorizes the African American cultural heritage and identity in 1920s America. Jes Grew is also the political and artistic spirit of Harlem renaissance which seeks the identity and existence in American lactation. It is the iconoclastic force to dismantle the established norms and notions of the western metaphysics to view the culture and history of African people.



## Iconoclastic Historicity: Response to Mainstream History

Reed's positioning history of the African people, who are considered as margins in mainstream historical and cultural canon,, at the center and describing the true black history based upon the cultural praxis of African people marks as the iconoclastic force to the myth creating glance of western metaphysics. Describing the wrong descriptions done from the hands of canonical historians, Reed, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, attempts to rewrite the history of African-American people from the mytho-cultural origin towards the present political situation displaying the fact of suppression, subjugation and exploitation and blacks 'continuous attempt for liberation attacking the dogmatic concept of western metaphysics.

African American expression provides a means of 'claiming the I' through telling personal and cultural histories that together form a vital strand of black experience not given space in traditional white history books. As Malcolm X writes in the Autobiography, at school when they came to the section on Negro History, "it was exactly one paragraph long" and told how the "slaves . . . were lazy and dumb and shiftless" (110). Instead of the dominant culture's control of language, African American culture took up the call to reestablish its own history as a means of political and social assertion, through a diverse 'telling', using a variety of avenues through which to express its own vision and to tell its own story rather than the 'whitened' version of culture and history. Reed, in *Mumbo Jumbo* skillfully says that the western men "say that he (Faust) has made a part with the devil because he invites the Africans who work in various cities throughout the empire to this castle . . . That is the nagging notion of western man" (91). The notion of the western man confuses Africans as devils undermining the vast cultural roots of black to which Reed calls the nagging notion. The use of memory has become central to this process, for it allows the



inclusion of stories excluded or denigrated or erased from the versions of white history. African myths, folklore, the communal stories and tales of slavery and freedom could be passed on orally, as they always had been, through alternative channels of communication within the black community.

In a world where power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging dictates, authorities and controls what can be said, done and thought, there is a need to intervene in the process and 'un-block' the imperialist grip on a single version, and to 'progress beyond a number of assumptions that have been accepted uncritically for too long' (Levine 444). For bell hooks this means habits of being that were a part of traditional black folk experience that we can re-enact, rituals of belonging . . . [the] sharing of stories that taught history, family, genealogy and the facts about the African American past (39). Reed's attempt here in *Mumbo Jumbo* is to verbalize the unseen history and culture of the African American people to which Reed applies iconoclastic paradigm.

Reed sets *Mumbo Jumbo* in the 1920s, which the narrator describes as "that 1 decade which doesn't seem so much a part of American history as the hidden After-Hours of America struggling to Jam" (16). The American president then was Warren Harding, whose short term was beset with scandal and mismanagement and who is blamed for the wall street crash and the ensuing depression. Reed samples historical, biographical and fictive texts to create a mixed-race Harding who enrages the Atonists by saying "the Negro should be the Negro and not an imitation white man" (147). The Harding of *Mumbo Jumbo* is merely a puppet president, his only acts of agency defined as black. The novel revises history with a black channel Harding who is placed in office to remove Jes Grew and then is assassinated by the Atonists when he shows his true color. Harding, the novel's Jes Grew dancer of indeterminate ancestry,



is used to undermine the symbolic value of his own position, the iconic Office of the president, and to install African American history among the detritus of the crumbling icon.

Reed authenticates his re-vision and inclusion of African American history with the trappings of historical scholarship: photographs, drawings, footnotes, quotations, documentation from many sources, and a "partial bibliography" at the end. Erik D. Curren argues that the bibliography's placement "at the end of a fictional text certainly parodies both scholarly claims to authority and the literary use of cultural documentation" (145). Curren points out that the bibliography attempts to do real historical and anthropological recovery work, harnessing the prestige of academic knowledge to support its critique of rationalism and its promotion of the African American narrative tradition (145). From this, a revision of African American history seems the crux of *Mumbo Jumbo's* use of the historical novel as both pretext of allegory and cultural icon. Traditionally, in the historical novel the link between the text and the historical reality outside the text is facilitated by a historical verisimilitude that allows the work to masquerade more readily as a possible representation of history. The illusion of "real" life in the text implies the illusion of historicity.

However, *Mumbo Jumbo* works on principles that run counter to any impulse toward verisimilitude; the characters, even the historical ones, have a life and depth that come only through the text, not by any pattern of correspondences with anything outside the text. For example, toward the end of *Mumbo Jumbo*, in the midst of LaBas' overlong lecture, he attributes the naming of Jes Grew to the historical activist and author James Weldon Johnson. LaBas, in his closing lecture, breathes life into other artists from American history: "Jes Grew, the something or other that led



Charlie Parker to scale the Everest of the Chord . . . Jes Grew that touched John Coltrane's Tenor; that tinged the voice of Otis Redding" (211). Reed, carefully links the sounds throughout the novel. If the pandemic is antiplague, it is also antisilence. The novel is a serious cry for a coalition of writers of color to address the specific experiences of their communities in crisis. Reed's narrative installs these historical African American figures in the midst of invented characters and sets each artist's inspiration in his fictive Jes Grew, thereby both acknowledging the iconic status of those men and the lasting value of their work and subverting that status with its fictive source of power.

Reed is writing from the stance of the African American whom Toni Morrison describes as "the subject of our own narrative, witness to and participant in our own experience" (208). Reed works to remove the African American experience from its placement as other in Western tradition. Reed wishes to loosen the stranglehold of the Judeo-Christian tradition on the cultural patterns of black people everywhere. Further, he wishes to reestablish the virtue of fiction as performance on the part of the artist, wresting it from the domination from the west. *Mumbo Jumbo's* allegory sets up all of history, black and white, as icon to take it apart, to sift that which deserves reverence, like the boundlessly beautiful shape-shifting of Charlie Parker's horn, to that which does not, like the fixed near-saintly status of James Weldon Johnson. History in *Mumbo Jumbo*, "is a pendulum. Not a river more akin to what goes around comes around" (218). It must not rest in fixed and static icons. In short, when the narrative demands that the reader "picture the 1920s as a drag race whose entries are ages vying for the Champion gross-been-age of the times" and describes the decade as a "shimmering etheric double" for which "candidates line up like Chimeras" (20), it demands attention to the ineffability of history, as to its ether-like boundaries and



interpretations. It insists that there is a black history within history and that the history is living tradition and felt experience, not empty icon.

*Mumbo Jumbo* works to disrupt logocentric historical construction and to show that such construction serves Anglo-European, Christian interests. It poses a central opposition between two camps: Set (and later the Atonists) and Osiris (and Jes Grew). The bad guys in the novel are the Atonists, who are the descendents of Set, followers of Aton the sun god, dedicated to reason, decorum, fact, and the accumulation of power. In Reed's novel Atonist ideology forms all of western European history; the Wallflower Order (an arm of Atonist power) seeks to maintain white supremacy, Christianity and the complete ideological assimilation of western scientific rationalism. Opposed to Set and the Atonists is Osiris, who becomes the father of musical and metaphysical Jazz, dance, Jes Grew, the work, Hoodoo. The battleground for those is history itself. The Atonists are clearly followers of Enlightenment historiographical principles. The Atonist path understand history as a progressive, motivated drama orchestrated by abstract nature and controlled by man's faculty of reason. Above all, the Atonists elevate reason as it is represented by scientism and theology.

The philosophy of Atonism is predicted on optimism and the doctrine of progress. Their historical attitude also tends to be mechanistic, more concerned with behavioural laws than with individuals and always threatened by abstraction. Von Vamption's fear of black folk literalizes the fear of individual difference that resists abstract behaviorual laws. "Individuality. It couldn't be herded, rounded up . . . what would happen if they dispersed, showing up when you least expected them, what would happen if you couldn't predict their minds?" (140). In the name of enlightenment, Biff Muscwhite berates Thor about the atrocities to Judeo-Christian



culture heralded by Barbelang and Mu'tafikah'. "They are lagging behind, son and you know in your heart this is true. Son, these niggers writing. Profaning our sacred words . . . They're the 15 who must change, not us, they . . . they must adopt our ways, producing Elizabethan poets; they should have Stravinsky and Mozarts in the wings, they must become 'Civilized !!!!!' (114). Most important, the Atonists apply metonymical strategies to the data of history, and those reductions may take the form of agent-act or cause-effect relationships. The Mu'tafikah are seen as agents in the cause of unreason, as is Jes Grew; to wipe out these causes is to wipe out unreason and the threat to civilization.

Thinking about history metaphorically in fact reverses and upsets all aspects of Atonist thinking. Benoit Betraverse can redefine progress, for instance. Instead of an abstraction, the result of casual relationships, Betraverse literalizes western progress in metaphor: "They are after themselves. They call it destiny. Progress. We call it Haints. Haints of their victims rising from the soil of Africa, South America, Asia" (135). The conflict between Jes Grew and Atonists path represents history. Jes Grew represents all that is improvisational, genuine, spiritual; the Atonists represent all that is artificial, controlled, mechanistic.

*Mumbo Jumbo* is a hilarious introduction to the deep imprint of the Afro-American imagination on American civilization and a satire which also restores reason and faith of mainstream canon. It depicts the history in reality and displays the subjugation, exploitation and domination done from the canonical western vision. The following expression of PaPa LaBas valorizes this fact: "In fact, 1 night you were reading a poem to the black woman . . . though your imagery was with the sister, the heart of your work was with the virgin" (35). This is the reality of sexual exploitation which has been excluded from white history books. Further, blacks had to be suffered



a lot by the so-called law and order of the western metaphysics. Positioning this a character in the novel says: "I spent 9 long years in prison for stabbing a man who wanted to evict my mother because she wouldn't fuck him . . ." (37). Such type of abuse and exploitation is prevalent, all over the novel. Mentioning such paradigms which are canonically referred as minor and excluded from the mainstream history books, Reed valorizes the suppression, subjugation and exploitation done by Atonists to the African-Americans in American location.

Reed is an iconoclast in terms of history and historicity in that he dismantles, violates the conventional norms and values of the western metaphysics to view history and culture of black people. He also undermines the Arnoldian sense of culture focusing upon the culture and history of African American people which was suppressed for a long period of time. His attack basically deals with his true representation of the culture and history of African-American people from the origin to the present American location. He unfolds the reality of the black people in America who want to liberate African Americans from the tyranny, atrocity and exploitation. For example, he sketches the notion on PaPa LaBas, the Voodoo detective, black historian and father of *Mumbo Jumbo* Cathedral from the vision of Atonists when the narrating voice says that the Atonists "really don't want him in jail. They want to wear him down, pierce him, enthrall him, tie him up by burdening him with petty court appearances so that he won't have time for *Mumbo Jumbo* Cathedral" (48). This sort of subjugatory practice is done from the Atonist path which Reed discloses in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Therefore, *Mumbo Jumbo* can be considered as the representative text of iconoclastic historicity.

On the other hand, Reed also shows the conflict between Jes Grew, the spirit of blackness and the Wallflower order, the enforced arm of the Atonists which



continually tries to suppress the spirit of blackness. Searching for the root of Jes Grew, the Wallflower order "launched the war against Haiti in hopes of allaying Jes Grew symptoms of attacking their miasmatic source. But little Haiti resists. It becomes a worldwide symbol for religious and aesthetic freedom. When an artist happens upon a new form, he shouts "I've reached my Haiti" (64).

*Mumbo Jumbo* looks past the idea of one true text, described ironically as "the anthology of the century" (81), to the many texts in which African American culture must find its own cultural identity. The deconstructive practice thus defines the text that Hoodoo needs as shifting, permeable, and expandable, as the words that germs avoid, the words that are antiplague (33). Although LaBas does not recognize this construction until later, the only texts able to be all that is required of them are the texts of ancient pantheistic religions, which have viable, dynamic, oral texts as mutable as life itself. The problem of finding suitable textual representation for religion delineates the distance between representation and idea. But LaBas and the reader must negotiate that distance in the search for the ultimate text, the Hoodoo text sought by Jes Grew. Reed uses multiple devices to allegorize the quest for the text as the definitive source of the knowledge and spirituality and to make clear that there is neither one true text, nor one method of finding it, saying this, Reed ironically targets the ethnocentric and unified notion of western metaphysics to view culture and history iconically. He works his way systematically through multiple texts, devaluing each in turn, beginning with his own novel. He avoids the vacuous ironies such devices often generate by grasping an essential tension. That all texts are untrustworthy is a necessary condition of postmodern fiction; that all texts present their material to some degree as facts deserving attention is the contradiction that redeems this skepticism from tedious nihilism. Overall, Reed's attention to facts and the trappings of realism



devalues the book as a novel; yet his attention to salting his fact with fiction devalues the book as sociology or history.

Reed places LaBas as an interpretative agent of black cultural history in *Mumbo Jumbo*, and the mythology he partly manufactures, partly explicates, the elaborate and supple contortions, the strange and arcane erudition he marshals demand attention. Throughout his quest, LaBas held central question as to how history should or could be passed down, how knowledge accumulates within stories and is then used to serve specific agendas. At the end of the explication scene, the final quotation, usually a statement of evidence, asks isnted, "is such an etymology to be trusted?" (191). With that, the long, intricately woven history, packaged neatly and ready to be set out as the new and iconic ultimate text, is quick deflated. LaBas confronts basic epistemological problems that he must approach through his interpretation of the text; he works in the ontological dimension of interpretation to ascertain the nature of the real and extends to it the moral, ethical, and religious ramifications of the problems of finding true meaning.

Reed continues on attacking the afro centric definition of Western metaphysics. Being in the position of margin, Reed brings the marginal cultural paradigms in order to shatter the canon of Western dogma. He further tells through the mouthpiece of narrative voice of *Mumbo Jumbo*, "Western man doesn't know the difference between a houngan and bokor" (91). Here, Reed attacks on the hasty generalization of the western dogma to view the African American people. Similarly, writers have been generalized by the western concept and thought to which Reed responses from the character and writer Safecraker Gould that "I'm not Wallace Thurman, Thurman is not Fauset and Fauset is not Claude Mckay, Mckay is not Horne. We all have our unique styles; and if you'll excuse me I think I will join my



friends" (102). Thus the western conception on the culture, history, art and artists is shattered vehemently in this novel.

The tension between celebrating ancient Egyptian and contemporary African American culture on the one hand and disparaging any rigidification or hierarchical ranking of cultural forms on the other is exposed in this novel. The Mu'tafikah agent Yellow Jack's reasonable expression supports this remark when he says to Berbelang " . . . we are just going to return the things, not pick up their habits of razing peoples' art. It is not Goya nor is it the painting's fault that it is used by Atonists as a worship" (110). Reed also attacks the 'superiority complex' of the western in the spiritual level when he says that the closest person of Christ was coloured. By this, Reed sets iconoclastic paradigm on the Western vision of spirituality where they were considered as superior and first chosen people of God. The conversation between Nathan Brown and Hincakle Von Vampton clarifies this remark when Brown says:

But your vast knowledge of civilization, Christ, Abelard, Prospero, your word order, think not instead of vulgar don't think, your consciousness of your black heritage but never allowing it to become a mystification as J.A. Rogers, Hughes, Mckay and some of that contingent; the way you recorded that Simon, the servant who carried our Lord's Cross, was colored. (116-17)

This shows the misrepresentation and undermine done from the whites to the blacks. Though there was the close affinity between black people and the Christian religion from the Christ's time, it was undermined and excluded from the white history book to which Reed attacks more.

History is the record of the events in the past, both positive and negative. But the Atonists i.e. westerners only wrote positive events in the relation of black and



white positioning blacks as inferior, God-hated and barbaric as well as uncivilized. It is according to them, their effort to bring black into the civilizational arena to which Reed attacks more. According to Reed, "there are many types of Atonists. Politically they can be 'left', 'right', 'middle' but they are all together on the sacredness of western civilization and its mission . . ." to dominate the African American people (136). Their ego of being superior one sidedly presses them to suppress and subjugate the minority groups in American location and blacks are also the victim of this. Reed realistically presents the exploitation and subjugation done by Atonists to the black people from the origin to the present political scenario when he forces his character Black Herman in the conversation with LaBas:

What for us heroes are for them robbers, killing a man who could not do malice with style is considered barbarism or cannibalism worshipping out of doors in the woods instead of in a Cathedral is a sign of unculturedness.

. . . I would image in that after the Americans withdraw, it will be completely deleted from the American "History Books". They've always wanted to drive out the ancient enemy, the anti-Christ as some of them call it. (133)

In this way, white historical conspiracy is depicted in the given except. This sort of misjudgement, misevaluation and mistreatment has been done by Whites from the origin to the present context of American location. Though there is the continuous struggle, but still blacks are in suppression, subjugation and exploitation till the present democratic time as well.

In Nutshell, Reed, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, tries to dismantle the logocentric notion of Western canon to view African American cultural history. Tracing the black



cultural history in spatio-temporal framework disclosing the facts and facets of suppression, subjugation and exploitation in a fictional shape to tell the reality, Reed projects the space for iconoclastic historicity in this novel. Unlike the western doctrinal notion, Reed rewrites, revisions the history and culture of black people from the origin to the 1970s American context, in which everywhere, black people are humiliated undermined and exploited. This true depiction of black history reverses with the Atonist order of history. Therefore, *Mumbo Jumbo* can be studied from the counter historical standpoint being a good example of iconoclastic historicity.



#### **IV. *Mumbo Jumbo*: The Text of Iconoclastic Historicity**

Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* can best be understood as the revisionist historical sketch from the cultural praxis in that it revisits the black cultural history from the voice of the margin attacking the established norms and values to view the African American cultural history in American location. Reed's attack on heuristic subject position, eschatological dogma, canonical culture and history foreshadows the conventional norms of western metaphysics and valorizes the cultural history of the margin i.e. black people who were, for a long period of time, dominated, subjugated and suppressed and also tried their best to counter such exploitation. Rewriting the history of African people in American location from its origin onwards, Reed scatters iconoclastic paradigm in the canonical mainstream history and culture.

Reed's identification of his art with Hoodoo seems a desire to restore to his work and to a communal folk culture, a dimension of authenticity that has been lost in the western revisions of cultural identity. Hoodoo is, after all, a survival of an era untouched by the atonizing, alienation effects of popular western culture. The earliest history in the novel centers on the African Osiris struggling with Set. Reed then depicts the history of Osiris as attacked and rewritten by the Atonists. Reed's characterization of the 'Book of Thoth' as "The original sound" (178) and his movement toward the prerational or antinormative is obvious as he takes the side of Sodom and Gomorrah, Boal, Greek mysteries, the Dynosian festival, Judas, Julian the Apostate, the 1920s Boehmians, the early modernists, the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, and the Afro-American spirit of the 1970s. In Reed's hands, these are not aberrations from the divine and blasphemies against the true God as in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, rather they are the true instinctive worship of all gods, recognitions of pantheistic and animistic realities.



Reed's depiction of Jes Grew, the spirit of blackness overtaking America, and its continuous struggle with the Wallflower Order sets another paradigm to form the iconoclastic history in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Obviously, Jes Grew has black cultural milieu: signing, dancing, communal acts etc. despite the monoglossic and one handed practice of the Wallflower Order. It has the cultural significance because it is the symbolic representation of Harlem Renaissance and Jazz culture which tried to blur the distinction between Black culture and white culture. Furthermore, Jes Grew suggests a perpetual revolution waiting for its next outbreak. Reed expresses much the same sentiment in his poem "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" which needs with Reed setting forth the elusive shifting text of spirituality that must begin in the individual who is both dancer and priest and spread along its own permeable and polyvocal path.

Reed is an iconoclast, but he is not spiritually a nihilist; he certainly has the thinking in the political arena as well. Therefore he attacks both the spiritual and political dogmatism of western conception where blacks are undermined, erased and do not have been given any humanistic impulses. He also attacks the Westener's doctrinal instinct of positioning blacks as barbaric, uncivilized and inferior. He foregrounds the black cultural heritage on the one hand and on the other hand rewrites the cultural history of blacks centralizing the culture and traditions of blacks. He also displays the suppression and misrepresentation done by the Atonists to the Jes Grew carriers i.e. blacks in their own history books. He is also not nihilist in the sense that he creates his central character as PaPa not Dada which has some religious signification. He attacks on the halo of veneration of western cultural history placing the marginal culture into the center in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Therefore, *Mumbo Jumbo* is the iconoclastic glimpse of cultural history and historicity weaved by the western metaphysics.



Thus, *Mumbo Jumbo* is the representation of iconoclastic historicity in which Reed portrays the black cultural heritage rewriting the history of cultural richness and unique tendencies of black people on the one hand and on the other, revealing the root or origin of the black people and disclosing the political situation and awareness in American location in the period of 1920s to present situation (1970s). It dismantles the so called unity and coherence, order and logic which the Western metaphysics has practiced in the consecutive periods. The vision of "quintessential Americans" (144) and "stale Atonists" (160) is vehemently shattered in this novel.



## Works Cited

- Adams, Hazard, ed. *Critical Theories Since Plato*. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992.
- Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Essays 1948-85*. London: Michael Joseph, 1985.
- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage, 2000.
- Berry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. Chennai: T.R. Publications, 2004.
- Bertens, Hans. *Philosophy: The Basics*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2003.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. *American Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Curren, Erik D. "Ishmael Reed's Postmodern Revolt." *Literature and Film in the Historical Dimension*. Ed. John D. Simons. Gainesville: U of Florida, 1994. 138-48.
- Elias, Amy. "Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*." *Critique* 41.2 (Winter 2000): 115-28.
- Fabre, G. and R. O'Meally, eds. *History and Memory in African American Culture*. New York: Oxford, 1994.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- - -. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the Racial Self*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Green, Michael. "The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies." *What is Cultural Studies?* Ed. John Storey. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. 36-51.



- Greenblatt, Stephen and Giles Gunn, Eds. *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Oxford: OUP, 1991.
- Grossberg, Lawrence, et al., eds. *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gurien, Wilfred L. et al., eds. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Harde, Roxanne. "We Will Make Our Own Future Text" Allegory, Iconoclasm and Reverence in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*." *Critique* 43.4 (June 2002): 361-77.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *A Glossary of Literary Theory*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Arnold, 2000.
- Hill Collins, P. *Black Feminist Thought*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Jessee, Sharon A. "Laughter and Identity in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*." *MELUS* 21.4 (Winter 96): 127-40.
- Johnson, Carol Siri. "The Limbs of Orisis: Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Hollywood's *The Mummy*." *MELUS* 32.3 (Winter 91/92): 435-45.
- Jordan, Glenn and Chris Weedon. "Literature into Culture: Cultural Studies after Leavis." *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Wough. New York: Oxford, 2006. 245-56.
- King, Richard. "Citizenship and self-Respect: The Experience of Politics in the Civil Rights Movement." *Journal of American Studies* (22-1). 7-24.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought form Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford, 1977.
- Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990.



- Lock, Helen. "A Man's Story is His Gris-Gris: Ishamel Reed's Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic and the African American Tradition." *South Central Review* 110 (1993): 67-77.
- - -. *A Case of Mis-Taken Identity; Detective Undercurrents in Recent African American Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.
- Ludwig, Sami. "Ishmael Reed's Inductive Narratology of Detection." *African American Review* 32.3 (Fall 98): 435-45.
- Marable, Manning. *Black American Politics: From the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson*. London: Verso, 1985.
- Mariani, P., ed. *Critical Fictions*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.
- Martin, Reginald. "Reed's *MUMBO JUMBO*." *Explicator* 44.2 (Winter 36): 55-57.
- Miles, R. *Racism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Mitchell, G. Duncann, ed. *A New Dictionary of Sociology*. Noida: Routledge, 1979.
- Morrison, Toni. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Toni Morrison*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1990. 211-23.
- Pronty, Kenneth E. "Orality, Literary, and Mediating Musical Experience: Rethinking Oral Tradition in The Learning of Jazz Improvisation." *Popular Music and Society* 29.3 (July 2006): 317-34.
- Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo*. New York : Simon and Schuster, 1972.
- - -. *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1978.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- Scholes, Robert. "Review of the Last Days of Louisiana Red." *The New York Times*, November 10, 1974.



- Scott, Nathan A. Jr. "Black Literature." *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. Ed. Denial Hoffman. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Sollors, Werner. "National Identity and Ethnic Diversity." *History and Memory in African American Culture*. Eds. G. Fabre and R. O'Mealleyl, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 81-97.
- Storey, John ed. *What is Cultural Studies?* New York: St. Marbin's Press Inc., 1996.
- Stryz, Jan. "The Other Ghost in Beloved: The Specter of the Scarlet Letter." *The New Romanticism*. Ed. Eberhard Alsen. New York: MacMillan, 1987. 125-41.
- Swope, Richard. "Crossing Western Space or the HooDoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo." *African American Review* 36.4 (Winter 2002): 611-29.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. New York: Gerald Publishing Inc, 1999.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. London: Fontana, 1981.
- Womack, Kenneth. "Theorizing Culture, Reading Ourselves: Cultural Studies." *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary*. Ed. Julian Wolfreys. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001. 243-54.



