

Tribhuvan University

Black Boy: A Reconstruction of One's Own Self

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Abstract

This research work on Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945) examines how Wright tries to reconstruct his own self through the narration of his childhood and adulthood experiences. While depicting himself, Wright through his mouthpiece "black boy," goes beyond the black stereotypes and fights against the ill treatments of whites in the white dominated community. Thus, he emerges as a different black man from his contemporaries. The first chapter gives a general introduction to the work. The second chapter makes the study of autobiography and autobiographical writings as a theoretical tool. The third chapter analyzes the text to reveal how Wright tries to reconstruct his self identity. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the work.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Richard Wright and His Works

Richard Wright was born on a Plantation near Natchez, Mississippi. His grandparents had been slaves and his father, Nathaniel, who was an illiterate sharecropper and mill worker, left home when Richard was six. Wright grew up in poverty, staying often at home of relatives. His mother, Ella Wilson, was a schoolteacher. She moved with her family to Memphis, where she found employment as a cook. In 1915-16, Wright attended school for a few months, but his mother's illness forced him to leave. He attended school sporadically, lived in Arkansas with his aunt Maggie and Uncle Silas who was murdered in Mississippi. In his childhood, Wright was often beaten. However, he continued to teach himself, secretly borrowing books from the whites – only library in Memphis. “My days and nights were one long, quiet, continuously contained dream of terror, tension, and anxiety” (15), he later wrote in his *Black Boy*.

Wright worked at various jobs, among others, he worked as a newspaper delivery boy and as an assistant to an insurance agent. His spare time jobs enabled Wright to buy schoolbooks, pulp magazines, and dime novels, all of which he read avidly. At the age of fifteen, he wrote his first story, “The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre.” It was published in *Southern Register*, a local black newspaper. Wright attended Junior High School in Jackson, Mississippi, and graduated in 1925. From 1925 to 1927 Wright lived in Memphis, where he worked for an optical company.

During these years, he read widely and decided to become a writer. Tired of segregation law, he moved to Chicago, hoping that life would be better

there. He worked as a post office clerk, at that time the only place the educated blacks could find work. During the Great Depression he held several other jobs. Wright was also given the opportunity to write through the Federal writers' project. By the time he moved to New York City he had written most of the novel *Lawd Today*, which was published posthumously in 1963. It centered on the life of Jake Jackson a violent man from Chicago, who has not much hope in his mean environment. Social environment also played a central role in *Native Son*, which was advocated especially by leftist writers.

In 1932, Wright joined the communist party and was an executive secretary of the local Club of leftist writers and authors of Chicago. He wrote poetry for such journals as *Left Front*, *Midland Left*, *Anvil International Literature*, *Partisan Review*, and *New Masses*. "Big Boy Leaves Home," which tells about the shocking end of the childhood of a young black boy, was first published in *The New Caravan* and was greeted as the best piece in the anthology. In 1937, Wright moved to New York City, becoming an editor of *Daily Work*, and later vice president of the League for American Writers. In 1938, Wright Published *Uncle Tom's Children*, a Collection of Stories of Southern racism, which was reissued in expanded form two years later. The story 'Fire and Cloud' was given the O. Henry Memorial Award in 1938. *Uncle Tom's Children* helped Wright win a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to devote his full time to writing.

Wright was named in the late 1930s to the literature editorial board of *New Masses*, and was denounced by the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities investigating the Federal Writers' Project. In 1940,

Wright's *Native Son* became an instant best seller. In some bookstores, stock was sold out within hours. The novel sold 215,000 copies in the first three weeks. Many white Americans saw Bigger Thomas, the central character, as a symbol of the entire black community, and Wright later stated that "there are meanings in my books of which I was not aware until they literally spilled out upon the paper" (qtd in Rayson 367). Wright used in the book *A 1938 Criminal Case* involving a black youth, Robert Nixon, who killed a white woman.

For the most part, the book was rendered in the present. Wright was an avid filmgoer and he explained, "I wanted the reader to feel that Bigger's story was happening now, like play upon a stage or a movie" (qtd in Rayson 93). In the first film version, directed by Pierre Chenal, and adapted by Chenal and Wright, the author himself acted the role of Bigger Thomas. Wright spent three years on the project. The film was a disaster. The 1986 version was directed by Jerrold Freedman and adapted by Richard Wesley. Oprah Winfrey was in the role of Bigger's mother:

The second adaptation even goes so far as to eliminate Bigger's murder of Bessie, in order to reinforce the idea that Bigger is a mild-mannered victim, thus robbing the story of any controversy, and dialectic, and any philosophical significance. It also robs the story of the complexities of gender relations between black men and black women that are touched upon by Wright. (qtd. in. Tibbelts, John C., and James M. Welsh 99)

The protagonist of *Native Son* is a young black man in Chicago, Bigger Thomas, who lives in a one-room apartment in Chicago's South Side Black

Belt, with his mother, his young sister, Vera and younger brother, Buddy. A wealthy family named Dalton as their chauffeur hires him. Mr. Dalton gives money for social welfare, but at the same time owns the rat-infested building in which Bigger lives. The rhythms of Bigger's life are "Indifference and violence; periods of abstract brooding and periods of intense desire; moments of silence and moments of anger like water ebbing and flowing from the tug of a far-away, invisible force" (Ward 78). The family's freethinking daughter Mary befriends him. He visits Communist headquarters, where she meets her boy friend Jan Erlone. Mary has had too much drink. Bigger carries Mary back to her room. When her blind mother enters the room, he accidentally smothers her. In panic, he burns the body in the basement and attempts to implicate Jan. Mary's bones are discovered and Bigger also kills his own girlfriend, Bessie, to cover his tracks. He is captured and in the jail Bigger feels for the first time a sense of freedom that "seems sort of natural-like, me being facing that death chair. Now I Come to think of it, it seems like something like this just had to be" (*The World of Richard Wright* 13). He is then condemned to death and faces his destiny unrepentantly, affirming that what I killed for, I am !' Yet in prison he also comes to terms with the need for a common brotherhood. The last third of the book is largely a speech given by Boris A. Max, a Party attorney, in Bigger's defense at his trial. Wright clearly used Max to convey his own Marxist assessment of the racial situation in the United States. The Speech is also based on Clarence Darrow's defense of Leopold and Loeb. Wright's leftist friends were troubled because Wright did not view Bigger's fate from an exploited worker's perspective. During the 1950s, the widespread fear of

Communism incited by the cold war and McCarthyism led to the diminished popularity of *Native Son*. The sexually explicit scenes were removed from the Book-of-the-Month Club publication and Thomas did not show such obvious interest in the white character, Mary Dalton.

After his breakthrough as a writer, Wright collaborated with Paul Green on a stage adaptation of the book, which was directed by Orson Welles and run successfully on Broadway in 1941 to 43. After his marriage with Rose Dhima Meadman ended, a white dancer, Wright married in 1941 Ellen Poplar, a daughter of polish Jewish immigrants and a fellow leftist. They had two daughters. The autobiographical *Black Boy* received good reviews. The book was set in the 1920s. It begins as the narrator accidentally burns his house down. Readers learn how he became a drunkard in his sixth year, and how begging drinks became his obsession. His mother and grandmother beat him so hard sometimes that he lost consciousness. His aunt in a Seventh day Adventist School, where she was a teacher, also beat him.

In 1944, Wright left communist party. He spent the summer of 1945 as an artist-in-residence at the Bread Loaf School for writers in Middlebury, Vermont, and then went to France with his wife and 4-year-old daughter. Wright met other writers and he returned to the United States only briefly and settled in Paris, where he associated himself with English and American writers. He helped James Baldwin to win a prestigious literary fellowship, and Baldwin repaid him four years later by criticizing the tactics of *Native Son* in his career-launching essay "Everybody's Protest Novel."

In 1949, Wright joined George Plimpton and others in founding the *Paris Review*. He acted in the film based on the novel *Native Son*. When the film was released, it was not successful, and was banned in several cities. Wright's existential novel *The Outsider* (1952), depicting a black intellectual's search for identity, received mixed reviews. It was praised mostly in Europe. In Paris Wright was not treated like in the American South, but he gradually lost touch with his inspiration, or "the rhythms of his life" (*The World of Richard Wright* 23)

During his years in France, Wright spent much of his time supporting nationalist movements in Africa. In 1953, he traveled to Africa, gathering material for *Black Power* (1954), and witnessing the rise of the Pan African Movement. Among his other works in the 1950s were *Savage Holiday* (1954), about a white man caught in a web of violence, *The Color Curtain* (1956) about Asia, *Pagan Spain* (1957), a travel book of a catholic country full of contradictions, and *White Man, Listen!* (1958), a collection of lectures on racial injustice. Wright's last short story, "Big Black Good Man" originally published in *Esquire* and collected in *Eight Men* (1961), was set in Copenhagen and dealt with prejudices. *The Long Dream* (1958), a novel set in Mississippi, had a poor reception. Its sequel, 'Island of Hallucination', set in Paris, was not published, "Everything in the book happened, but I've twisted characters so that people won't recognize them," (*Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* 43) Said Wright to his agent. *American Hunger*, a sequel to *Black Boy*, appeared in 1977.

Wright distanced himself in the last years of his life from his associates. He suffered from poor health and financial difficulties and grew suspicious

about the activities of CIA in Paris in which he was right. Wright's plans to move to London were rejected by the British officials. In 1959, he began composing haiku, producing almost four thousand of them. Wright died nearly penniless at the age of fifty-two in Paris, on November 28, 1960. At his request, his body was cremated and his ashes mixed with the ashes of a copy of *Black Boy*. Wright's daughter Julia has claimed that her father was murdered. Upon his death, Wright left behind an unfinished book on French West Africa. His travel writings, edited by Virginia Whatley Smith, appeared in 2001.

The focus in Wright's fiction is on racial discrimination in Southern part of America. All his writings are set on black people's life, their suffering, poverty, hunger, fear, etc. The present research tries to analyze *Black Boy* as a memory of his childhood and youth as its title suggests that it is an autobiography. However, more than that it is a personal history. Wright has attempted to write the history of Blacks, the intra-racial and inter-racial violence. Wright in this work fights to shape himself rather in a different way than other uneducated, ignorant and orthodox blacks of the south do. He avoids going to religious ceremonies, disobeys his senior family members and relatives, fights against his friends at school and abuses the educational system of the South.

Though Wright presents the anger of the black authority, more dominant in the novel is his contempt for the whites, he presents the miseries of blacks for which the whites are responsible and rejects their values and finally, leaves for the North.

Black History

Black history in North America began in August 1619 after a Dutch frigate sold twenty black captives to Jamestown settlers. The Jamestown Colonists required workers for clearing fields, planting crops, making roads and building houses. Therefore, they accepted blacks happily as a source of free labour. Before the arrival of blacks in Jamestown, the native settlers did not have the practice of slavery. However, they had made practice of indentured service. The rich whites kept the poor whites as indentured servants. Consequently, those twenty blacks brought by the Dutch ship were treated as indentured servants. As the time passed, the status of black servants did not remain the same. Gradually, black servants were not treated as white ones. White servants had certain freedom after the end of some terms and conditions, white servants had written contracts but not black ones. White landowners exploited them. Ultimately, black Servants were indentured for life. Then, their children were also treated as indentured servants from birth to death. In this way, the slavery system in America was established during 1640 to 1680.

Slowly, the demand of white servants decreased. It was so because blacks could be owned for life. Consequently, the demand of black labor increased on the large plantations of Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas. Though majority of people raised voice against slave trade in 18th Century, wealthy slave owners and slave traders suppressed the voice. Most of the slaves were sold to plantations in the West Indies, Virginia and the Carolinas. The economic base of plantation depended on the production of cash crops such as tobacco and cotton. Their large-scale production was based on the use of very

cheap labour. As a result, plantation owners did not have any willingness to change the institution of slavery. Rather, they feared the loss of economic growth in their plantations. During the 1770s and 80s, the American colonists revolted against British rule. They advocated for self-determination, democracy, equality and recognition of the natural rights of man. The eminent leaders were Patrick Henry, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. However, the voice of democracy and equality went in vain. Those leading figures could not abolish the slavery system. As a result, the voice of liberty, equality, democracy and human rights became only daydreams. Whites accepted the slavery as economic necessity. Moreover, they started to develop the concept that blacks were inferior. On the one hand, personal freedom was valued, on the other blacks were treated as inferior race. Then, the conflict between blacks and whites arose. Some educated blacks became aware of slavery system and fought for the freedom of all blacks. They organized campaigns for freedom and dignity for all blacks. Prominent black leaders were Benjamin Banker, Paul Cuffe and Frederic Douglass.

Consequently, the slavery system was first abolished in Pennsylvania in 1780. Then, many northern states abolished slavery. Runaway slaves started to take refuge in Free States. In 1793, the Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law to stop the flow of the slaves to the Free States. Slave owners declared rewards for the return of runaway slaves. Moreover, they formed a group of professional bounty hunters to arrest fugitive slaves. After 1830, the situation changed and offering food and hiding places aided fugitives. However, the Congress issued a tougher Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. The law imposed severe

penalties to anyone assisting Negroes to escape from bondage. The process of the end of slavery started in April 1861 with the outbreak of the American civil war. The war was held between Free States of the North and slave states of the south.

To some extent, this step became helpful for slaves to escape from slavery. The next process of emancipation took place on January 1, 1863; president, Abraham Lincoln declared the complete emancipation of black slaves. However, Slavery system was not ended. Later, in 1865, Congress passed the thirteenth and fourteenth Amendments to the constitution. That Constitution Completely abolished Slavery. Paradoxically, blacks were deprived of voting rights by local laws and customs. Hence, a system of racial segregation arose. Blacks had to use separate schools, churches, hospitals, parks, swimming pools, and bus and theatre sections. Moreover, blacks were discriminated in terms of jobs and housing since the beginning of the twentieth Century.

During 1930s, a great economic crisis took place in America. It was a quite difficult time for every American. Whites were given jobs and welfare aid but blacks were not. The economic depressions ended with the outbreak of World War II. American factories started to produce weapons. So, both blacks and whites were benefited from employment. In September 1940, president F. D. Roosevelt offered training and job facilities to the youths. However, black youths did not get room for training. 'Before 1940, less than 4,000 Blacks joined Army force. They were treated as servants rather than soldiers. Young blacks strongly objected to this situation. Many whites, including Eleanor

Roosevelt, the president's wife joined the campaign to get blacks right to fight for their country.

The campaign got success on December 1, 1941 as Army Air Force was opened to qualified blacks. In the spring of 1963, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., non-violent civil rights movement started. More than 250,000 people of all races marched in Washington D.C. demanding "Justice for all." King delivered heart touching speech. He said:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveholders will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their characters. (4)

The focus of Civil Rights Movement was on the abolition of segregation. Consequently, the Civil Rights acts of 1964, 1965 and 1968 became landmarks in dismantling the legal basis for discrimination. In 1983, 40 percent of employed blacks occupied white color jobs. They involved in mental works rather than physical ones. That number increased in 1989 and became 44 percent. 23.5 percent of blacks between 18 and 24 were enrolled in college. The percentage of college admitted students was only 15.5 percent in 1983. Then, the purpose of civil rights movement shifted from the abolishment of racial discrimination to "affirmative actions". Affirmative action aimed to overcome the present effects of past discrimination. This program focused on expanding opportunities for women, minorities and the disabled.

The movement ranged from public to private programs. Such programs included recruitment, quotas for women, minorities, and the disabled. Moreover, it stressed for job training, professional education, employment and the placement of government contracts. The goal of these programs moved from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome. However, Americans are still under the conflict of between equality of opportunity and of outcome. Many Americans object to this idea. They strongly oppose quotas and policies that restrict individual's freedom. The challenge of pluralist democracy is to balance these conflicting values.

Black Literature

Black Literature in America began in early nineteenth Century. Before the civil war, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) appeared as a prominent black woman novelist. She published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which became an impetus for civil war (1861-65). This novel united Northern feelings against slavery. It was story of an old black slave, Uncle Tom who had a hope of freedom, but he never escaped from slavery. However, this text helped expand the campaign in north against southern slavery.

Consequently, it led to civil war. In this regard, Abraham Lincoln advocated that she was the little woman who made the book that led the Great War. After the civil war, local color writers emerged in literature. These writers focused on local materials in their novels. Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) was a southern writer. Though he was white, he exploited Negro folklore. His *Uncle Ramus Tales* was written between 1880 and 1892. He employed animal characters. The hero was little Rabbit who used many tricks to escape from his

old enemy, “Brer Fox.” This was exactly how the black slaves resisted their masters in the old south.

After Harris, Mark Twain (1835-1910) occupied special space, in novel writing. Twain focused on racism. His masterpiece was *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In this novel, Jim, an escaped slave, gave threat to white masters. In the early twentieth Century, the position of blacks remained very bad. In the south, especially government laws were used to keep black Americans in low social position. A powerful organization, the Ku Klux Klan, was organized in order to use violence against blacks. Around the turn of the nineteenth Century, large numbers of Blacks began moving from the South to cities of the North. In the North, young artists and writers began their struggle for social justice for their people. In literature, this struggle began with *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by W.E.B. Du Bois. In this novel, Du Bois described the effect of white American racial prejudice in the minds of blacks. In addition, for the first time, he explained the special American black culture. This culture united them into a single nation. Du Bois also employed the theme of “Black cultural nationalism” in his novels. Later, Du Bois became interested in Africa. For him, Africa was the spiritual and cultural home of all blacks. He remarked:

This (Africa) is not a Country; it is a world, a universe of itself and for itself, a thing Different, Immerse [. . .]. It is a great black bosom where the spirit longs to die. It is life, so burning so fire, encircled that one bursts with terrible soul inflaming life. (211)

The era of the 1920s was known for the Jazz Age. Jazz was a musical form created by southern blacks. It also became an important part of white

culture at that time. Black talent in the arts and music flowered during 1920s, 30s and 40s. This artistic awakening began in Harlem, a mostly black section of New York City. It was known as “the Harlem Renaissance.” The Harlem Renaissance produced the novels of Zora Neale Hurston (1903-1960), Richard Wright (1908-1960) and Frank Year by (1996-). It inspired the poetry of Countee Cullen (1903-1946), Langston Hughes (1902-1967), James Weldson Johnson (1871-1938), Claude MC. Kay (1890-1948) and Sterling Brown (1901-1984).

The writers in this movement were influenced by the experimental styles of European and American literature. They attempted to talk about the experience of black people in American Society. Langston Hughes [1902-1976] was one of the leaders of Harlem Renaissance. He experimented with the Jazz and blues rhythms of black music. He celebrated the joy of motion in his poem, "Dream Variations" (1922): “Dance! Whirl! Whirl! Till the quick day is done [. . .]” (Line 10). Initially, Hughes did not attack white society directly. Later, his poetry began to express intense anger against white government. In his poem "Harlem" (1951), he warned whites that there might be an explosion of black violence if blacks could not get social justice for themselves. He asks:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or Fester like a sore

And then run?

Or does it explode? (Line 6)

Next, leading figure of Harlem Renaissance was Countee Cullen (1903-1946). He focused on love, beauty and the shortness of life. He clearly expressed the pain of being black in America: “So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds, and wait, and tend our agonizing seeds” (Line 5). The next step in black literature was the exploitation of realistic technique. Richard Wright (1908-1960) did it in a number of works using powerful realist techniques. The five short stories in his *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938) gave a detailed description of the violence used by southern white society against blacks. He created a new metaphor for the blacks that were invisible in American society.

Ralph Ellison (1925) used this same metaphor in his *Invisible Man* (1925). He presented a nameless black protagonist who lived ‘underground’ in a hole in New York City. He believed that whites could not see blacks as individual people. In the fifties, the Beats Movement emerged calling for a revolution in Consciousness. The pioneer figure was Ginsberg who published, “Howl.” Howl was the manifesto of Beats movement. This movement began among college students. They were the “Hippies,” angry at the policy of white government. They looked for new experience through love, drugs, and oriental religions. By the middle of the sixties, the streets were filled with angry young people demanding equal rights for blacks and end to the Vietnam War.

In 1960s, many blacks and young whites joined in the huge civil Rights movement. Its Purpose was to change the laws, which hurt blacks. Its call was for “Freedom now.” Although it succeeded in changing the laws, many other problems remained the same. Then, they called for “Black Power” to fight for their own economic and social rights. In the writings of James Baldwin

(b.1924), the rising anger of blacks could be observed through his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. He projected how race, sex and religion influenced the lives of people. Although he believed in non-violence, later he supported violence. He gave warning to the white society through his writing.

In 1964, Black Arts movement started with the aim of radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposed for separate symbols and myths. Le Roi Jones' *Play Dutch Man* stunned the theatre world. He openly represented that blacks were better than whites were. Whites were evil for him. He used the dialect of Poor blacks in his poetry. The civil rights and black power movements fired the women's right movement of the 1960s. Women writers focused on the liberation of the race and the improvement of the black community. Black women writers were M. Walker, Rosa Guy, Paule Marshall, Kristin Hunter, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Goyl Jones and Toni Cade Barbara. These writers rejected Eurocentric models and interpretation of manhood and womanhood. They further turned to non-western, non-white communities and Afro-centric models. These writers continuously searched for the roots of Afro-American culture and institution black, music, speech, religion, land and the family. In addition, they reconstructed ancient myths and rituals.

The Idea of Racial Antagonism

Racial antagonism is one of the most potent elements of contemporary Socio-political unrest. It is one of the most dangerous elements surrounded by emotion, passion and fear. In America, there are about 150,000,000 African-Americans, most of whom descended from slaves brought from Africa after

1619 until the civil war (1861-65). The African-Americans were first introduced in America as slaves in 1619.

African-Americans, the then Negroes came in large numbers with the Europeans as explorers and as servants as they set out to exploit the resources of the New World. From the sixteenth century onwards Europeans ranged the earth conquering native people and establishing themselves as conquering and ruling aristocracies. Then especially during the seventeenth century, ruling whites subjugated blacks who became increasingly conscious of their racial differences.

Until the late eighteenth century, thinking about race was distinguished chiefly by its verbosity. In theory, Christianity argued that all men are spiritually alike in the sight of god, but in practice, all source of arguments could be found to prove the inferiority of the black man. By the late eighteenth century, the Enlightenment was in full swing, and efforts were made for the first time to assure a scientific understanding of race. Distinctions were made between higher and lower races. European whites were placed at the summit in the hierarchy of races. With the onset of imperialism in the late nineteenth century, it became necessary to show that weaker race should die to make room for the European strangers. Racism became more and more irrational. The only important thing was to prove the inferior races as “Outsiders,” a kind of racial proletariat with the firm objective to keep them under subjugation.

The history of America begins with the grabbing of the land from Native Americans and enforcing the blacks to cultivate the land. It consequently created hierarchies in color and division of land. The whites established a

system of privilege. in terms of oppression and exploitation. Harris and Ordonia say:

The social divisions along the color line crossed class, nationality, language, and religious barriers. The simple fact of “whiteness” meant the overall life, fortune, and destiny of white people. . . white people were exempt from slavery, land grab, and genocide- the first form of white privilege. White enjoyed wide latitude. Of opportunities, personal freedom, and democratic rights protected by state. Even though poor American born and immigrant whites were viciously exploited by rich white people, they were not on the bottom. The bottom was reserved for Indians, black, and other people of color. (27-28).

Thus, the American society was clearly based on exploitation.

Previously rich white people and later on the whites in general, excessively exploited Indians and especially blacks and marginalized them.

The history of American society is history of oppression and migration. American geographical cultural space has provided limitless potential for the whites since its settlement, but the blacks have been denied such spaces. Their African heritage and later the southerners are repudiated by the larger culture. Over the different historical events-slavery, emancipation, migration and integration, they tried to negotiate their relationship with their cultural traditions. However, white race and its cultural heritage consistently marginalized them. Therefore, it will not be hyperbolic to state that American history itself is a practice of racism.

American society generated and condoned so much prejudice before the abolition of slavery, that the country since has not been able politically to remove the evil effects of its former bad example. One white man in the south had always had greater power than two or three white men in the north and Negroes were entirely excluded from their proportionate representation and participation in the government.

The government had failed in the hands of the white man to do political justice to itself and to the Negro. American injustice to her colored citizens deprived the American people of their just influence in the world movement of freedom and democracy. Regarding Political prejudice, George W Ellis in his essay “The Psychology of American Race Prejudice” says:

The government of the United States represented at its birth the political dream of countries. By its Constitution, it substituted for the capacious of man the government of the people regulated by law. Founded upon the freedom and equality of all men. It invited to its shores the oppressed of every land. Its founders laid the foundations of a democracy that was supposed to be a political light to the nations of the earth. But before this government was established the institution of slavery had manufactured so much class prejudice in industry, education and religion, that at the adoption of the Constitution, the white race was unable to make this government in fact what in theory it was announced to the world. (15)

Thus, it is clear that there was ambivalence in American politics. On the one hand, there was commitment for political equality and there was prejudice on the other. The Negroes were restricted in the matter of political activity. As slaves, they were obviously outside the party system and could take no part in government. This situation continued even after the civil war.

It is from the time the Africans were first brought to America, the Social body and mind of the white race had been acting against the Negro. It was supported by an active and increasingly hostile sentiment and emotion that constitute the historical cause of that abnormal social situation in the United States. The social situation was a threatening social malady. It embraced years of ethnological misinterpretation on the one hand and social customary practice on the other. Despite the fact that the Negro was involved from the very beginning in the problems of America, first as a group of colonies, then as a nation, the Negroes had been placed at the last ring of the social ladder.

The African-American lived in a state of constant humiliation. His dignity as an individual was not admitted and he got no respect from the white and even non-white people of the world. The African-American was segregated from school, deprived of public facilities and had to suffer excessive police brutality. The Afro-American's identity was only that of a wage earner and professional man in American society. African-Americans were never privileged for skilled jobs. Rather they continued to be concentrated in the less skilled jobs and most of them remained unemployed. They were living with both socially and economically depressed status. It is due to the discrimination against them in training and employment opportunities offered by the armed

services, discrimination against them in vocational and academic training, discrimination against them by labor organizations, discrimination against them in referral services rendered by state employment services, the African-Americans were forced to live under the depressed status. Moreover, the Afro-American students had been denied admission to the white school. Even if given admission, a black student was not given equal treatment. He was required to sit at a separate table in the library and have a specific seat in the classroom.

It was believed that many Negroes were poor, uneducated and deficient in health, morals, and manners and thus were not very agreeable as social companions. It was also pointed out that Negroes were different in physical appearance even if they had the same basic mental capacity and moral propensities. Besides these beliefs centering on Negro inferiority, there are a great number of other popular thoughts arranged to justify social segregation the thoughts that Negroes liked to be separated, that they were happy in their humble status, and would not like to be treated as equals. Another idea with the same function is that the separation was necessary in order to prevent friction between the two groups.

Against their condition, the Afro-Americans started uttering the voice of deep hurt and bitter disappointment. They glorified the attainments of Negroes in music, literature, painting, athletics, business or the professions. They promoted Negro fraternal orders, civic association, Churches, commercial establishment and other groups and institutions. People like cooks, butlers, house cleaners and shoeshine men served white people but they no longer

trusted, respected nor loved them. In addition, with the breakdown of faith in the integrity of the white power structure, there was loss of respect for law as an effective means of social change. Since the African-American were merely bundle of resentments and sufferings, an explosion was inevitable. As a result, on December 1, 1955, an explosion emerged with a Negro woman's refusal to a bus driver's demand that she got up and let white man have her seat. This step, indeed, sowed the deed of Afro-American revolt, which later flourished in a disastrous way.

With germination of the sense of revolt, organization such as the National Association for the Advancement of colored people (NAACP), the committee on Racial Equality (CORE) and the urban league accelerated movements for African-American rights pointing to the doctrine of human equality and of the natural or divine rights of man. "Freedom Riders" ranged through the south demanding de-segregation and implementation of the US Supreme Court decision on educational desegregation.

When the civil war broke up, the slavery system was abolished and the Negro was emancipated, but Wright gained only partial freedom. Emancipation elevated him only to the position of a semi independent being. As a laborer or tenant farmer, the Negro was discriminated against and exploited. Those in the educated, Professional, and intellectual classes suffered a similar fate. Except for a very small percentage of the Negro intelligentsia, says Harold Cruse, the Negro functioned in sub cultural world made up, usually of necessity, of his own race only. The only factor, which differentiates the Negro's status from that of a pure colonial status, is that his position is maintained in the "home"

country in close proximity to the dominated racial group. It is not at all remarkable than that the semi-colonial status of the Negro gave rise to nationalist movements.

In the revolt against historical exploitation, beatings, jailing, and killings of Civil Rights activists, Blacks in the communities across the nation began striking out in rage. In Harlem in 1964, in Watts in 1965, in New York and Detroit in 1967, and nearly in every city in the nation in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., all responded to the needs of the black lower class. Some groups promoted the development of an indigenous African-based cultural value system, ritualized in the ceremony of Kwanza, a holiday celebrated from December 26 through January 1 to reinforce the spiritual ties of black Americans to Africa. Others, such as the Black Panther party, the Revolutionary Action movement (RAM), the Republic of New Africa, and the League of Revolutionary Black workers, adopted the ideology and strategy of achieving black self-determination by any means necessary including the armed struggle.

Literature Review

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* has received a host of criticism from numerous critics since its publication 1945. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury view the work as a product of Wright's troubled life as they say, "Wright gave a black American portrait of the troubled artist" (336). Similarly, Andrew Delbanco takes the book as a reflection of the writer's own life. He comments, "this Mississippi origin are the subject of *Black Boy* the book in which he recommends his awakening from a brutal childhood" (10).

Tamara Denissova views *Black Boy* as having the theme of self-indentification. He writes:

For Richard Wright the problems of self-indentification provided the major quest of his life. Throughout this life he was trying to define himself existntially, identify his roots, his place in life as a negro, as an intellectual, as man as an American. That is, he was literally observed with the ideas of self-indentification. (10)

While comparing the book, *Black Boy* with Paul de Man's "*Autobiography as De-facement*", Peter Ramadamdanovic finds striking similarities between the two works. He remarks, "Both works' main subject is Autobiography. *Black Boy* arguably defined African American Autobiography for the twentieth century" (1)

"In his autobiography , Elizabeth Schulty writes, "Richard Wright describes the desperate hunger for books which characterized his boyhood and the diverse sugterfuges he divised in order to satisfy it" (639).

Jerry W. Ward, in an editorial review on *Meion Encyclopedia* of literature writes:

Black Boy is a classic American autobiography a subtly crafted narrative of Richard Wright's journey from innocence to experience in the Jim Crow South. An enduring story of one man's coming off age during a particular time and place *Black Boy* remains a seminal text in own history about what it means to be a man , black and southern in America. (IX)

The critical responses on *Black Boy* reviewed by the present researcher are worthy instruments to substitanate the present study. Whatever the criticism is either autobiographical or a document of racial injustice or a journey from

innocence to experience can be further more justified when the text is analyzed from the perspective of expressive theory to which the above criticism and a thorough study of primary source is essential.

II. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE

General Meaning and Definition

Autobiography, which is a record of one's own life in the form of literature, is defined as the exploration of self. Life has a certain course of its own. It is a sequence of events from birth to death, during which s/he has many names and relations, jobs and experiences, joys and sorrows, meetings and separations, aspirations and commitment, success and failures etc., which are the parts of his/her life, and these are the things that s/he generally has to live with. Autobiography thus is the medium of expending those personal things. It reveals the person as s/he is to himself or herself. Therefore, autobiography is a self-written document.

There are diverse opinions about autobiography, and the term is variously defined. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines autobiography as "the story of person's life written by that person." J.A. Cuddon's *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* interprets autobiography as "an account of person's life by himself or herself" (68). Joy Paul Guilford says:

What is a life—a sequence of personal events of birth, school, marriage and parenthood, work, retirement and death? I recall one time hearing Charlotte Buhler defend the thesis that, in effect a life is like a symphony; it has a control theme, with variations on that theme. There is a strong feature of unity about it. . . if a life is a kind of symphony, an autobiography is written about on

unfinished symphony, and it gives only one rendering or interpretation. (169)

According to Steven Kepnes, autobiography is “The reconstruction of the movement of a life or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its centre of interest is the self not the outside world Autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern and life, constructs out of it a coherent story” (106).

Through these definitions, it can be concluded that life, which has a central theme, is a sequence of events from life to death. Autobiography is not necessarily a record of his/her whole life but an unfinished harmonious record or rendering and reconstruction of the self. It deals with the significant past experiences, feelings, circumstances, life events etc. of an individual by himself. Thus, it is generally a self-written biography.

M.H. Abrams says, “Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself” (15). To make a clear notion of autobiography, he adds:

It is to be distinguished from the ‘memoir’ in which the emphasis is not on the author’s developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private ‘diary’ or ‘Journal’, which is a day to day record of events in a person’s life. Written for personal use and pleasure, with little or no thought of publication. (15)

Abrams’s definition makes it clear that autobiography is a self-written biography but it is not a mere record of the people and events that he witnessed,

or a daily record of events of one's life, which are not publicly important. Rather it deals with author's developing self and only those events and experiences, which have public concern. It is not outward but inward like Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1915), James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young man* (1915) and Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* etc. (1915).

To make the point clear it would be better to explore on the questions like – What should autobiography include? According to Collier's

Encyclopedia:

It is a life narrative written by the author himself. A definition, which can be held to include such other forms of literary self-revelation as memoirs, journals, diaries and letters. All these forms are closely related and often shade into each other; they can therefore, be conveniently discussed in one article. What is autobiography? Asked George Borrow. Is it record of the incidents of a man's life or is it a picture of the man himself, his character and his soul? (843-44)

From this definition, it is clear that autobiography has two sides: one is factual narration of past events and experiences, and the other is self-revelation that is mental picture. A good autobiography, however, includes both. Nevertheless, self-revelation is not an easy task. So, the autobiography takes the help of symbols, which refer to any aspect or the non-symbolic region. In this sense, it would not be improper to say that autobiography employs symbolic as well as biographical materials. Carl R. Roger in the book *A History of Psychology in Autobiography:*

I assume the purpose of an autobiography is to reveal the person as he is to himself and, either directly or indirectly, to reveal some of the factors and forces, which centered into the making of his personality and his professional interests. So, perhaps the first question to answer is who am I? Who is the person whose life history is to be explored? (343)

Similarly, William Spengeman in his book *The Forms of Autobiography* also argues about 'self:

Without a self one cannot write about it, but whatever one writes will be about the self it constructs. Autobiography, thus, becomes synonymous with symbolic action in any form, and the word ceases to designate particular kind of writing. (168)

Thus, 'self' is a centre of such writings, and symbol is the best instrument to reveal the 'self' (soul). In this sense, symbol is integral part of writing autobiography. The main concern of each autobiography is the realization of the absolute self, and enterprising or enacting it symbolically. Almost all writers make use of symbols, which express and ease their burden. It can appear in any form or in any kind of writing e.g. novel, poetry, drama etc. They are themselves the creation of facts and fictions. That is why autobiography is not a jumbling or gathering of all of the factual aspects and incident of him, rather it is artistically filtering and contently organized piece of art. It is written not only for one's self-satisfaction but for the benefit of other people as well.

Harry Herson further makes the point clear:

As one sets himself to the task of writing his autobiography, questions immediately arise: what should he include? What should he omit? What will be of interest to his contemporaries? What to posterity if any one is interested in the background details of a life behind the public printer record. The objective facts are available elsewhere. What is not so easy to determine and is known only to the writer-such as, the choice points in his career, the way his teachers and colleagues have affected him, and his aspirations and goals are matters of personal evaluation and its attendant bias. However, it is in such personal matters that the individual is revealed. (195)

From the above quoted lines, it becomes clear that autobiography, despite its biographical nature, is a work of art. And as a work of art it gives pleasure to the reader and the creator at the same time.

Historical Background and Its Development

Many people have created important literary biographies in different times, which exist in various forms and levels. The exact date of the origin of 'autobiography' cannot be traced. However, most of the critics and scholars agree that the first autobiography was St. Augustine's *The Confessions* of the fourth century, which is an intensely personal account of spiritual experience and extraordinary instance of deep psychological self-analysis of a kind.

Thereafter Adam Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, gives a brief account of his life. This tradition continues taking different forms, in different ages but no great work appeared until Renaissance.

The idea of individual-self (existence) and writing of autobiography is not also the product of the present century. Cuddon writes, “The term ‘autobiography’ appears to have been first used by Southey in 1809” (68). This genre is more imaginative, humanistic, and individualistic in general senses. It is possible only from the free exploring, self conscious and creative mind and the self which were the gifts of Renaissance, and later that of Romanticism.

Spengemann writes:

These phenomena have been traced, by modern scholars, to the renaissance, to the renaissance, to classical Antiquity and beyond. The word ‘autobiography’ itself is two hundred years old [. . .] are the intellectual foundations for the genre as we know it were fully laid at least by the end of the seventeenth century.

(176-177)

Despite continuous debate over the self-existence of autobiography, there have been many autobiographies and critical and journal writings over it since the theoretical and practical foundation of the genre modeled by St. Augustine. Autobiography has come, into existence from fourth century with St. Augustine’s *The Confessions*. But the sequence of forms in autobiography and the causes behind its formal change from history to philosophy and ultimately to poetry and fiction depicts the picture of the entire development of the genre from the middle age to present. Spengeman makes it clear:

What I call historical autobiography seems to me to accord perfectly with the climate of opinion regarding the self that prevailed from the middle ages to the enlightenment, philosophic

autobiography to reflect the changes in the climate which occurred around the turn of the nineteenth century, and poetic autobiography to express the radically altered conditions that resulted from the ideological upheavals of the nineteenth century. Only St. Augustine remains a true anomaly in this pattern. (XV-XVI)

Thus, St. Augustine's *The Confessions* has become the model for many years. It is still taken as classic example and theoretical basis of this genre. Autobiographies have appeared in different forms, and various purposes. Bede (673-735) has given a brief account of his own life in the *Ecclesiastical History*. After that, there was a little note of inaugural kind of spiritual autobiography in *The Book of Margery Kempe* by Margery-kemp (1373-1439). In sixteenth century, also the autobiographies were common. Benvenuto Cellin (1500-1557) and Cardan (1501-1576) also wrote the vivid autobiographies but it was the cult of anthropocentric humanism, during the renaissance, which encouraged people to explore and analyze themselves in detail than ever before. This kind of subjectivism led them to write autobiography. Marlowe [1564-1593] and Shakespeare [1564-1616] as well explored the self of their characters and laid it bare in front of their audience. Many critics and readers have studied Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as the autobiographies.

Thus, the analysis of characters and personality in the literary works like plays, essays, Fiction, poetry etc. has become frequent. Similarly, many critics applied the autobiographical approach to study these literary genres. Due to the

popularity of the autobiography, the practice of keeping diaries, journals, memoirs and autobiographical narratives had become a fashion since 17th century. Pepy's *Diaries*, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1660) and Thomas Brown's *Religion Medici* (1642) are more or less self-revealing form of autobiographies.

Likewise, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1766) and especially Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781) were the most powerful and influential books ever written. Almost from its origin in the eighteenth century novels and autobiographies were closely connected. In other words the writers, especially the novelists, use the genre as medium of expressing their 'Self' and personal matters through the character as their personal. Cuddon, in his *Dictionary* writes;

During the 18th century, we find there is some connection between autobiography and the relatively new form of the novel. For example, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* [1719] and Stern's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) are taken to be a kind of autobiographical fiction or fictionalized autobiography. A good deal of fiction since has been thinly disguised autobiography. (70)

This tradition was gradually advancing and improving from 19th century onwards, one finds almost all kinds of autobiographies like factual, detected narrative, self-exploring and self-revealing narrative and narrative of soul's progress etc. Meanwhile, very long poems were also used for autobiography. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) is a classic example of this type of autobiography. As one reads it, he easily thinks the poem as an autobiography

of Wordsworth it reflects and lightens one's inclination to think of autobiography as a species of poetry.

Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, autobiographies like Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* (1850), Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849-50), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Carlyle's *Reminiscences* (1881) and many others have contributed for the development of the autobiography as a distinct genre. Some of them have become the best models for the later autobiographers. Critical interest in autobiography was growing fast in the later half of the nineteenth century. There were three events, which helped to expand its popularity. There was a sudden increase in the popularity of all sorts of autobiographical writings; high increase of essays on autobiography appearing in the literary Journals; and the publication of Wilhelm Dither's proposes for a study of human history based on the reading of autobiographical documents. Thereafter this genre has spread its roots in all directions.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, there appeared some great autobiographies, whose works have highly contributed in the development of the genre. Among them Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography* (1904), Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905), Maxim Gorki's *Childhood* (1913), *Among people* (1913) and *My University* (1923), 'James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) are the major works. These are the representative writers not only of that period, but also of the three Continents-Asia, Europe and America. Thus, autobiography has the international popularity and world recognition. In the field of poetry W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) is the most outstanding poet of the

period and may be of the whole country. “The Career of Willam Butler Yeats,” writes David Daiches, "Epitomizes the history of English poetry in his life time" (1226). He made the poetry express his passion, and concept of love, sex, art, religion, nationalism, symbolism etc. and made his poetry best autobiographical. He made his poetry as Oscar Wilde says, “I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction” (77).

Up to 1930, many critics and scholars had taken the autobiography not as a freestanding genre but only as a subcategory of biography. At the same time, the earliest English studies on autobiography as a distinct genre had justified separate treatment of this literary genre on primarily psychological grounds. It was the influence of Freud’s works especially, *An Autobiographical Study* (1927). However, it (autobiography) could keep its own self-identity when psychology was in its heyday and sweeping power.

After the First World War, there was a kind of movement writing and publishing autobiographies, the readers of autobiographies surprisingly increased throughout the world, which made many Journalists and Scholars think the reasons behind it. So they began to ask questions like – why do people write autobiographies? Why do people read them? Are they better when personal or when anecdotal? Are they primarily factual or literary? What forms may they take? There were also some bitter criticisms. However, the authors and scholars kept on their journey correcting the weaknesses and ignoring the false criticism. Until that time, it had become very popular in Germany, England, France and America as well.

Even during and after the Second World War, autobiography was flowering. This flood of personal histories was generated by the war. Sometimes it puzzled the people and sometimes won their heart. John Osborne's famous play *Look, Back in Anger* (1956), which depicts his time and contemporary young generation, can be studied in the light of public as well personal autobiography. Thus, it began to dominate the literary markets over long period almost around the world. In political level as well, there appeared famous autobiographies of great politicians and thinkers like Russel, Churchill, Nehru, and Gandhi and so on. Among them, Gandhi's *The Discovery of India* is very popular.

English translation of Misch's *Autobiographic* in expanded and advanced form is taken as a great event in this field. Similarly, Wayne Shumaker's *English Autobiography* (1951) is the first work in English to study the autobiography apart from biography, and Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1980) is the most advanced and Systematic book in this field. It has done the most balanced theoretical and practical study of the genre. Throughout the 1960s and after that a succession of articles followed. Appeared in the literary scene, which had pleaded for the recognition of autobiography as a distinct form of literature some of them scolded the literary critics for neglecting it. This tradition is ever extended to the eve of the new century.

Thus, autobiography has a distinct place as a literary as well critical form. It is the out come of continuous struggle. Edwin G. Baring, in his preface

to *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* aptly writes, “Auto biography improves with age as it ripens into history” (11).

Types of Autobiography

St. Augustine, who is supposed to be the first Autobiographer, has set the problems for all later autobiographers and the genre as well. This fundamental issue has always made the scholars ponder on it. The autobiographers have worked on the various themes. Some examples are in response to the continuously changing ideas about the nature of self. The way of realizing and identifying the self and the appropriate methods to communicate these apprehensions have concerned those writers. However, the focus may change from person to person. If we observe an autobiography, written by any writer, we can find the writer interested in many aspects as in the memory, recollection of the previous actions, the aspiration and commitments, the surroundings and society, jobs, friends, laws, religions, feelings, emotions, thoughts, dilemmas, conclusion of life and life philosophy and the developing self itself of the writer etc. But to carry out all these things through words is a very difficult task so the writer, according to him, necessity and interest uses different literary devices e.g. symbols, images, personal etc. for his convenience. Not so all autobiographies can be of the same nature.

Autobiography also is not exception from it. Many critics and readers have studied them by dividing into various forms. St. Augustine designed three style: historical, philosophical and poetic Spengemann writes:

for these three methods of self-knowledge, Augustine devised three autobiographical forms historical self recollection,

philosophical self-exploration, and poetic self-expression from which every subsequent autobiographer would select the one most appropriate to his own situation. 56)

From Spengemann's opinion, the completely autobiographical works can be studied under three categories. This is more scientific and practical distinction than others are. So it would be appropriate to discuss them in brief.

Historical autobiography deals with the self-recollection. It seeks to connect the writer's past with present to find the change in him/her in between. Personal typicality, spiritual reality, and objective truth formed the original foundation of historical autobiography. Cuddon also writes, "From classical themes . . . history and autobiography was almost the same thing . . ." (69). So the autobiography can be a useful medium to know the history of the person. The very quality made autobiographical writings popular, and it is still taken that autobiography as an instrument of knowledge. Collier's Encyclopedia mentions. "The autobiography is the personal history of the author" (555). When he ascribes the present wisdom, the autobiography seriously complicates the act of selecting the experiences to include in the autobiography. Spengemann writes, "For any historical autobiography who makes his present knowledge the effect of casually connected experiences in his past" (37). Dante and St. August frequently used this form. However, the proper way to recall the past days or make a record of those days in narrative is through autobiographical writings. In addition, the narrative in such writings gets its climax in fiction. So a number of novelists have used this form as an

instrument to write their own life history namely novels e.g. *The Mill on the Floss*, *David Copperfield*, *The Song of the Lark* etc.

Philosophical autobiography does not deal with the self-recollection but with the exploration of self. In this type of autobiography, we may not find the self-events of the author. However, it aims to do something the life has not done, conveying through inquisitive action to self-knowledge. The autobiographer discovers the truth from his/her own life by projecting an unbroken life through the very experiences that have caused his/her problem in the first place. Every new discovery seems not only to review the existence of hitherto unsuspected world of facts but also to question the very concepts that had led to the discovery. This is the ever-changing and ever-shaping process. J.A. Cuddon argues, “Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed, truth may be distorted for the sake of cinematic or harmony and the occlusions of time may be observed as much as they reveal” (68).

An autobiographical writing moves from recollection to reflection and to plausible reaction, and ultimately, it moves to spontaneous exposition and again to the next recollection and so on. St. Augustine’s *The Confessions*, Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* are the classic examples. Spengemann writes, “Wordsworth forgoes explanation to ‘make rigorous inquisition’ through himself in search of some ultimate wisdom, a Universal truth that can inform the long philosophical poem which his autobiography is a necessary prelude” (74). Novels like *The Portrait of Artist*

as a *Young Man*, *The Song of The Lark* etc. can be studied from this angle as well.

Similarly, poetic autobiography does not aim to give his readers his own biography but to express the self by using symbolic actions. Only symbolic expression can catch and display an autobiographer's unique and profane nature. Through symbols the poet realizes and expresses the self to the readers so that they could share his achieved state of being and the view of the world. T.S. Eliot urges the authors to use the 'objective correlative' for that function. Spengemann writes:

The effect of such an autobiography will be not to inform the reader but to transform him. By participating in the symbolic actions through which the writer realizes that divine me of his; the reader comes to share the autobiographer's achieved state of being and view of the world. As the words of the text are come and adequate symbol of the writer's spiritual evolution, so are they the correlative objects of an analogous development in the reader's soul. (113)

Such autobiography provides a kind of symbolic experience in which the reader may participate. Similarly, it counteracts the anarchic effects of social mechanism. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the effect of true poetry as:

Now many chains are to be broken. I shall mount above these clouds and opaque. Airs in which I live-opaque though they seem transparent and form the heaven of individual existence and

totalitarian effects of truth I shall see and compare had my relations and know what I am doing. (Emerson 63)

This symbolic expression is the only choice to carry out the author's unique and private self. It makes the public self-receptive to the heart's secret truth became symbols make them comprehensible to the common sense. In fiction, authors also make use of characters, as they are the source of symbolic actions. He is trying to understand and their ungraspable meaning seems to be the secret of his own true being in that sense, novels like *David Copper field*, *The Artist as a Young Man*, *The Song of the Lark* etc. are the poetic autobiographies of the respected authors. These three types of autobiographies cover almost all autobiographies written so far but it seems proper to have a holistic approach to judge them. Since every good work of art consists of all these features, it is true that one may be in dominating position but the rest cannot be ignored because they are the parts of the organic whole.

According to the uses of autobiographies in study, Spengeman divides the genre in two sections: one deals with autobiography as a source of information, and the other as a literary form. It depends on the situation and purpose of the users.

Some students and critics of autobiography are inclined to divide the autobiographies in various ways as spiritual and secular, humanistic, private and public, religious, subjective and social national and political. In addition, there are other divisions of it like according to time as fourth century autobiography, Renaissance autobiography, eighteenth, nineteenth and

twentieth century autobiographies etc. and according to the country, as English autobiography, French, German, American autobiographies, etc.

Some scholars have read autobiographies in the light of psychology calling them as psychological autobiographies. Among them J.P. Guilford, Hary Gelson, Henry A. Murray, Carl Roghers, J. Pidget, C. Thomson and Edwin Boring are chief scholars. Edwin G. Boring writes, “Psychology in autobiography can not be complete, but it can make a contribution to the history of Psychology which is unique” (124).

Autobiography has a long history. It has come across from many critical situations. There was a time when its value was neglected. Up to 1930s, many critics admitted it only as a subcategory of biography. Its present status is the outcome of a long struggle. It has a changing nature. It is always going towards prosperity but its concept is changing with the time and its emphasis is also shifting. If one consciously reads the criticism and the autobiographies themselves written over years, one can notice a shift of emphasis from the biographical and historical facts recorded in it to the psychological state depicted in it. At the same time, he can find its criticisms and definitions embracing a wider variety of literary forms. Spengemann writes:

People, who make list of autobiographies, for example tend to restrict the definition quite severely, for purely practical reasons. Those who wish to extract from autobiography information about the writer’s life and times will regard the genre as comprising only works that contain this sort of information which, those who feel that our essential being is unconsciously extended the

definition to cover many forms of symbolic expression. Similarly, those who wish to demonstrate the artistry of autobiography have no difficulty including poems and novels in the genre. (185)

Here, Spengemann resolves all the problems of definition. He answers all types of questions from various fields and approves its wide spread scope. It shows that there were many turns and up-downs in its history. Similarly, the purpose of the autobiographies may vary from author and reader to reader. Today, autobiographies can be found in different forms and size but no one can challenge its distinct identity among the genres. Autobiography as a genre can comprise many other literary and critical forms such as poetic, dramatic, narrative, critical forms of genres etc. So, novels like *David Copperfield*, *The Artist as a Young Man*, *The song of the Lark*, *The Blackboy* and so many others can be studied as the autobiographies of the respective authors.

Every work of art more or less consists of facts and fictions. So autobiography, as a work of art also may consist of fiction. Cuddon writes, "An autobiography may be a largely fiction. Rousseau's *Confessions* is a case in point. This is unreliable as literal truth; it has a different literary value" (68). Thus, literary work can be used as a source of information about the author if not about the other people and society. Cuddon refers to Dr. Johnson: "In Dr. Johnson's opinion no man was better qualified to write his life than himself (68). Thus, almost all autobiographies can be studied in two ways: as a source of information and as a literary form for pleasure. Some work scan be studied either as a more source of information or as an aesthetic form or both.

As far as intention and limitation of autobiographer is concerned, he whose intention is to give his own history connects his present knowledge with the experiences of his past. Similarly, Dante, the author of *Lavita Nouva*, takes each event as a link in the chain that fastens past and present. An autobiographer cannot possibly include all of his experiences. So, he is obliged to decide which one is the most important and most interesting. The autobiographer is not completely free to make choices because he is restricted as much to the aesthetic criteria as to the strict demands of truth.

Autobiography is a mirror of the artist. Earlier, it was generally a matter external and biographical record. However, the modern notion of autobiography is not close to the biographical aspect; rather it is a literary form, which has a distinct and independent identity. It gives the best account of the individual and reflects the self of the author during the time of creation rather than factual presentation of the self. Therefore, it may be the imaginative work combining facts and fiction in any forms eg, novel, poetry etc. However, the historical or biographical aspects of the author cannot be ignored.

As a personal record of the author autobiography reaches nearer to the history and presents a picture of ever changing 'self' and mental interaction between two opposite forces of mind and heart, it reaches in the domain of psychology. Similarly, it can inter into the domain of other disciplines and genres e.g., philosophy, politics, poetry, fiction etc. Spengeman writes, "Autobiography made its way from the realm of history to that of literature by slow process that began years" (209). As a work of art, an autobiography consists of fact and fiction and makes use of literary devices, symbols and

images. Consequently, a host of critics appeared in the domain of autobiography. Some of them associated this autobiography with the fiction and others with poetry. Leon Edel, for example, wrote an essay 'The Novel as Autobiography' in his famous book *The Modern Psychological Novel* (1955). Such association was intensified by the new critical hostility shown against historical biological and psychological interpretation as well. It performed the already reduced association between autobiography and historiography and at the same time, it enabled this genre, autobiography as a freestanding literary form. Then it is read separately like other narratives – biography, journal, story etc. Therefore, Alfred Kazin wrote an excellent piece "Autobiography as Narrative" in his book *The Young Writer* (1965).

Thus, autobiography has been accepted as a freestanding genre. It has developed its own critical methods, which are applied to read the autobiographical works. Sylvere Monod, William Spengeman and many others have made a detailed autobiographical study of Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* by Dickens, *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and *Artist as a young man* by James Joyce are autobiographical novels. Spengeman comments on *The Mill on the Floss*:

There is an autobiographical impulse in this novel (Maggie and Tom Tulliver are clear projection in some degree of the young Marian Evans and her brother) which further complicates its pattern, giving it a pervasive emotion and something an excessively high-pitched note so that at moments it reads like the work of a passionate and gifted adolescent. (1069)

Similarly, Hermione Lee also mentions that Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* is her autobiographical novel. She writes:

Cather also embodies herself as she has done before and will do again, in her objectified male character. Godfrey St. Peter is fifty-two the same age she is when the novel is published . . . Like Cather, he has tender memories of his time in France in his youth, and all his association with that country-youth, Spring, Sweetness-are Cather's. And his professional history mirrors his own. (228)

From the above discussion and illustrations, it can be concluded that the autobiographical approach is one of the valued approaches to study and analyze literary works.

Autobiography: A Reconstruction of Self

The importance of de Man's 'Autobiography as Defacement' does not redefine autobiography but it offers a new way to understand that autobiography is an attempt at restoring another's identity. This overall argument relies on the following two assumptions. First, autobiography is neither the most actual of literacy genre, nor an undividable mix of truth and fiction, rather it is a particular "figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all terms" (192). The second assumption of "Autobiography as Defacement" is that understanding the processes through which a subject is formed. They assume that the process of reading is analogous to autobiographical self-making in the sense that they both involve, and told through, a series of imaginary self-identifications. That all texts

contain an autobiographical moment and one of the fundamental textual qualities acts as a reciprocal identification between the author or the reader and the self in the narration. The goal of identification being the restoration of the authors or readers' identity is not supervision then since autobiography is a figure of reading, since all texts contain an autobiographical moment.

III. *BLACK BOY*: A RECONSTRUCTION OF ONE'S OWN SELF

Black Boy is written in retrospect from the viewpoint of grown and mature Richard Wright. The style of Wright's first-person narrative brings two important factors into the story. The first is that the reader is allowed into the insights of the author on his own childhood. Wright is able to make a very powerful commentary regarding the era which he documents in *Black Body*. Second, we realize that although the accounts are taken as autobiographical, Wright's narrative allows him the freedom to invent rather than record only the events and facts of his childhood. Wright does, in fact, generalize his own experiences to draw conclusions about the manner in which society functions.

When the novel unfolds, we can see Wright setting fire in his home. This shows him as an alienated individual who hides himself for the fear of other family members. He remarks, "I yearned to become invisible, to stop living" (11). This shows that he possesses a different nature right from his childhood. The account of Wright's childhood reflects that he was not treated well at home. "I was beaten out of my senses" (13). He is fearful of his mother's intense beatings, careful to avoid his father, afraid of his grand mother's white image, which usually forced Wright to visit church. This theme of alienation is one that continues, both in relation to Richard's family, the black community, as well as the white community. Wright's sense of isolation in his orthodox family environment comes out in rebellion, evidenced by his burning the house down and killing the kitten. Richard kills the kitten out of resentment towards his father and his unwillingness to obey authority. Richard's parents and relatives play a wavering role between subordinators who

try to suppress him and authority figures that try to raise him under strict moral. This rebellion is well developed later in the novel when he is introduced into white world. There was yearning for identification loosed in me by the sight of a solitary ant carrying a burden upon a mysterious journey" (26).

Wright criticizes black community for their lack of cultural unity and tradition, this belief seems to stem from Wright's own experiences of alienation from the black community as well as his own family:

Wherever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. In addition, when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clan, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty and the capacity to number were native with mans. (45)

Wright very quickly points out that despite the oppressive society created by white man and the southern tradition, blame was to be held over the black community for allowing themselves to be subordinated. He claims that black life in America was essentially bleak and that the emotional strength of the community was simply born out of negative confusions. The portrayal of flight, fear and confusion is reflected in Richard's own constant moving. Moving from orphanage, to his grandmother's, to his aunt Maggie's and back to West Helena are some instances.

The constant need to flee is manifested in Richard's feelings of alienation with his schoolmates. Before attending school in West Helena,

Richard was absorbed in the activities of the other neglected children who roam the street playing pranks. In school, Richard describes himself using the metaphor "as still as stone" (49), because his feeling of isolation almost paralyzes him. Among the other black children, there is no sense of friendship or unity. Instead, Richard is mistrusting the others, hating them as well as himself. We see this evidenced in his unwillingness to thrust Uncle Hopkins after he drives the buggy into the water. The paralysis that occurs in school seems to occur with Miss Simon, who attempts to win over Richard's confidence. This distrust is also seen in Richard's aversion to religion. Unlike his extremely religious grandmother, Richard fails to place his faith in any kind of god.

Richard's intra-racial hatred gradually develops to interracial hatred. He begins to understand more about social relations between blacks and whites. However, unlike his mother, his hatred for the white community stems much deeper than racial injustice:

I noticed that there were two lines of people at the ticket window, a "white" line and a "black" line. During my visit at Pranny's a sense of the two races had been born in me with a sharp conferees that would never die until I died. (55)

Part of Richard's internalization of emotion causes him to place the anger he has built toward his parents and others into his anger towards whites. He describes how upon hearing rumors about racial beatings and murders he began to imagine men against whom he was powerless, giving "meaning to confused defensive fallings that had long been sleeping "(52). White people

begin to become symbol of oppressor, representing every fear and authority figure that had once intimidated Richard despite the faith that he, himself, had never been abused by whites until this time.

Richard's anger towards whites further increases when he starts knowing about the treatment they show to blacks. The blacks never feel themselves safe any time. Richard finds in his uncle Hoskin's "face the memory of terror"(62). One day, he goes to saloon hiding a revolver. Therefore, Richard "asked Aunt Maggie why he kept the gun so close to him. She told me that men had threatened to kill him" (62).

The incident of Uncle Hoskins murder by the whites substantiates Richard's felling of revenge. He even saw the fear of whites upon the animals too;

As the strange animals came abreast of me I saw that the legs of the black animals were held together by irons and that their arms were linked with heavy chains that clinked softly and musically as they moved. The black creatures were digging a shallow ditch on each side of the road, working silently, grunting as they lifted spades of earth and flung them into the middle of the roadway. One of the strange animal striped, turned a black face upon me; "what are you doing?" I asked in a whisper, not knowing if one actually spoke to elephants, He shook his head and cast his eyes guardedly back at a white man, then dung again. (67)

Richard always keeps on asking questions against whites to his mother." Why don't all black people fight against all the white men out there? There are more

black men than white men" (68). In the response, he gets that white men are strengthened by gun, which the blacks do not have.

Growing older, Richard started associating with a gang of older black boys who share what he describes as learned hostility toward white people and the digress of values assigned to race. He analyzes a typical afternoon with his gang:

It was degrading to play with girls and in our talk; we relegated them to Remote Island of life. We had somehow caught the spirit of the role of one sex and we flocked together for common moral schooling. "We used the word "nigger" to prove the tough fiber of one feelings; [. . .] of an afternoon when school had let out I would saunter down the street idly kicking an empty tin can, . . . "I had buttermilk and black eyed peas . . ." (88-89)

Their conversation, their attitudes, and their ideologies, according to Wright, reflect the culture of one black household was thus transmitted to another black household. With the gang, Richard also participates in fights against white boys, throwing rocks and bottles, somehow needing medical attentions afterwards;

Them white folks sure scared of us, though". The first white sonofabitch that bothers me is going to get a hole knocked in his head "Man, you reckon these white folks is ever going to change. "Silence, somebody would pick up a stone and toss across a field."Man what makes white folks so mean?." Niggers smell from sweat. But white folks smelt all the time "The enemy is an animal to be killed on sight. (90-91)

This shows how violent thoughts pervade black psychology when they are ill-treated. These also further increase the tension in blacks and Wright himself:

We were now large enough for the white boys to fear us and both of us began to lay our traditional roles as though we had been born to them as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct . . . Our battles were real and bloody; we threw rocks, cinders, coal sticks, pieces of iron and broken bottles, and. We threw them we longed for oven deadlier weapons. (93)

Richard as a 'Black Boy' is isolated from the world of the white people, but this isolation is felt within his own race as well within the black community, he is never able to find a confidant and does not allow himself to reveal his feelings to anyone. When he enters into the gang, he seems to find comrades among his fellow gang members, but their relationship is superficial-based on their similar racial prejudices rather than friendship. The racial tension between blacks and whites is the only common factor that Richard seems to share with those friends, which come into play later on in his autobiographical account. In away, their tensions consume Richard and his attitude; his seemingly violent nature belies the anger and the hatred that he stores emotionally. Similarly, When Richard must make friends at the new school in Greenwood; he must fight to gain trust and respect.

This feeling of isolation is not limited to his peers; his hostility toward Uncle Clark and Aunt Maggie is the one that is repeated toward his other relatives. For Richard, Uncle Clark and Aunt Maggie provide routine and restraint that he is unused to. From the start, we see that Richard is different

because of his strong will and insight. In some ways, refusing to sleep in his own bed can be interpreted as a manifestation of his unwillingness to obey authority or to conform.

One source for Richard's isolation is revealed when he claims that after his mother's operation, she becomes dead to him. Constantly sick and in pain, his mother becomes a symbol of the suffering Richard has encountered and will encounter throughout the rest of his life. By disallowing himself any emotional reaction to her pain and sickness, he creates a facade for himself. We see that Richard deals with his pain essentially by building an emotional wall around him:

At the age of twelve, before I had had one full year of formal schooling, I had a conception of life that no experience would ever erase, a predilection for what was red that no argument could ever gain say, a sense of the world that was mine and mine alone, a notion as to what life meant that no education could ever altar. . . (123)

The self conscious attitude that gradually starts developing in Richard further comes in complication as he is admitted to a religious school under his grandmother's religious supervision, Richard once again feels hungry, both physically and intellectually. For Richard, religion is more of a hindrance than a path to salvation. It is his grandmother's religious beliefs that not only prevent him from being adequately fed but also stunt his intellectual growth. His education at the religious school is almost a joke and Granny and Aunt

Addie consider any literature other than the Bible. Religion is another obstacle set down by the authority to make him conform to the existing system.

Interacting with his peers at the religious school, he concludes that he does not need religion to be strong. Richard sees that the other boys are willless. When he is beaten for eating in school, he realizes that there is no solidarity among these children, and that the students have no moral or brotherly obligation toward each other. The neighborhood boys sent to convince Richard to join in the revival, which disgusts Richard, because of his own ignorance. Rather than open his heart toward religion, Richard is inclined to become more isolated and independent.

It is this sense of isolation and independence that, in the end, drives Richard toward writing. We still see that Richard is young and naive. He does not realize that power that words have (a power he will discover later in life). Instead, his writing brings him satisfaction only because his words confuse others. The reaction of the young woman will be echoed later in the novel when others read Richard's writing and question him.

All his life, Richard has been programmed to react with hostility and violence. At school, he finds that he can only gain acceptance among his peers if he is able to fight the other boys:

I was now with boys and girls who were studying, fighting, talking; it revitalized my being, whipped my senses to a high, keep pich of receptivity. I know that my life was revolving about a world that I had to encounter and fight when I grew up. (138)

At home, he can defend himself against beatings only by showing the same brutality toward his authority figures. When Uncle Tom is angered by Richard's words, he realizes that he does nothing but provoke hostility in others. He has been trained emotionally to regard everyone as his opponent. His violent nature perhaps stems from the lack of compassion shown to him by those who are expected to nurture him; his mother, his relatives, his teachers, and his elders.

By this time, Richard experiences for the first time the decision he must make between the value of money versus the value of his moral and social beliefs when he knows secret about the newspaper he sells from a black man who is a carpenter by trade:

"Did you ever here of the Ku Klux Klan?" he asked me softly.

"They kill us. They keep us from voting and getting good jobs." I said.

"Well, the paper you're selling preaches the Ku Klux Klan doctrines,"

he said. . . . "He read aloud a long article in which lynching was passionately advocated as a solution for problem of Negro

. . . "How on earth could I have made so grave mistake." (145-146)

The same papers that allow him to buy lunch, read, and make money also promote the racist values. Later in Richard's experiences, this trade off between social subservience and making money comes in to play.

The son of a sharecropper, Richard's job as an assistant to Brother Mance, brings him back to his roots on the southern plantations. He feels no ties or kinship to the plantation workers he meets. Their naiveté, stupidity, and gullibility strike him as astonishing. His feelings play into his criticisms of the black community. He points out that his race's social subservience stems from their own ignorance. There is no solidarity among blacks, proof given by their willingness to cheat each other just as Brother Mance sells life insurance to plantation workers who are likely never to see a dime of it. Similarly, he holds the plantation workers acceptable for their own lack of education.

An integral part of Richard's maturation is learning how to interact with others, including white people. Before his job, Richard has never really been informed about the relationship between whites and blacks. In his childhood, the value placed on one's race was learned second-hand; from his relatives, peers, and elders. When he takes his first job in the home of the white woman, Richard gathers first-hand experiences of prejudices and discrimination, which he had only heard or dreamed. He is treated without respect and without human decency; Richard realizes that because he is black, he is not expected to set goals for himself, to achieve success. It may seem that the white woman simply echoes what Richard's relatives have come to believe, but her words are ten times worse because it is an opinion based on speculation and assumption:

I recalled hearing that white people worked upon Negroes as a variety of children, it was only in the light of that her question made any sense [. . .] I would draw a line over which they must not step I would be polite humble, saying yes sir and no sir, yes

ma'am and no ma'am . . . I saw a plate of thick, black molasses and a hunk, of white bread on the table. I can't eat this I told myself . . . had I kept the job I would have earned quickly just how white people acted toward Negroes. (161-63)

Richard realizes that to survive in the whites' worlds is worst of all. He must be broken of his will to adjust himself there. Before his job, Richard had been shielded within the black community. After being scolded and deprecated by the white woman, he learns that whites expect him to be subservient and stupid. Anything else could be considered sassy. Richard refuses to return to his first job-where the woman served him stale and moldy food-out of pride. However, he must learn that he cannot run away from prejudice. The racism he encountered at his first job is prejudice. The racism he encountered at his first job is prevalent everywhere in the south and Richard must learn to react.

His desire of not conforming is tested within the black community as well, with his mother's pressures to be baptized. Wright recalls that his baptism was not a matter of religious belief, but of social pressure and acceptance. The church, he claimed, exploited every relationship: mother-to-son, brother-to-brother, and friend-to-friend. In the end, Richard consents to baptism." I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost"(171). However, along with the other baptized boys, Richard feels no different than before. "Even after receiving the 'right hand of fellowship,' Sunday school bored me" (171). It is ironic that his baptism-what is considered a rebirth in the eyes of god-leads to Richard's eventual rejection of religion.

In the year 1924, Richard obtains a job in a brickyard brining pails of water to the thirsty black laborers. One day, Richard is bit in the thigh by the white man's dog. Afraid of infection, Richard reports the bite to the supervisor but receives as medical attention. "A dog bite cannot hurt a nigger," (180) replies a white man.

Little by little with his increasing interaction with white people, Richards learns more about their dismissive attitude towards black people. He is treated inhumanly when he is not given medical attention for the dog bite. Whites carry the attitude that black laborers are unsusceptible to anything.

Wright's mouthpiece, "black boy" gradually develops a rebellious attitude towards the whites and educational system. He, finally, prepares for publishing a story. When "Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre" is published, nobody can comprehend Richards's accomplishment. He receives only negative feedback. It is ironic that one of Richard's most meaningful achievements serves only to isolate him more from his environment. Instead of praise, Richard is seen as different. "I was disappointed; I had taken time to write it and he seemed distant and uninterested" (182). In the novel, Wright reflects upon the fact that racism and prejudice are products not only of the attitude of whites in the south, but are products of educational system. Black children are taught in ignorance, given no goals or motivation to grow as intellectual. Therefore, it becomes very harsh for him and he desires to go to North to find a suitable enrolment to define him:

I was building up in me a dream which entire educational system of the south had been rigged to stifle. I was feeding the very thing

that the state of Mississippi had spent millions of dollars to make
are that I would never feel; I was becoming aware of the thing
that the Jim Crow laws had been dread and passed to keep out of
my consciousness. (180)

Richard becomes more conscious of the brutality and conduct of the racially
oppressed south when he learns that Ned's brother Bob has been murdered by
some white man.

"Hello, Ned. What's new?" I asked.

"You've heard, haven't you?" he asked.

"About what?"

"My brother, Bob?"

"No, what happened?"

Ned began to weep softly.

"They killed him," he managed to say. (189)

The murder of Bob Greenley is elevated to myth-like status-in the mind of
Richard Wright. Because he has never witnessed the racial brutality and
misconduct of southern whites, his fears are elevated the way a small child is
afraid of the Boogie Man. However, for Richard, the situation is real: he must
learn to be having correctly forth sake of his own life. Richard, however, is still
strong-willed, evidenced by his refusal to recite the principal's speech.

We also see that Richard's isolation from his family becomes more
apparent to him when he accidentally overhears Uncle Tom scolding Maggie.
Although his relatives are a constant source of negative feedback, his isolation

from his own family can be seen as a source of Richard's strength, At his young age, he has learned out of necessity to be independent and willing to fight.

Richard experiences racial violence first hand when he begins to work in town. Inexperienced in his new environment Richard finds it difficult to act properly the ways other black boys act. "Richards, Reynolds, here tells me that you called me Pease" (208). Growing with broken schooling and in the black community, Richard has learned to be self-sufficient and defiant leaving the job at white man's house in a short time. Even when he tries to conform to, he is not subservient enough. Ration is bred by ignorance, and Wright portrays that to survey, a black man must act as his white counterpart. A black man must laugh, talk, and act gracefully towards a white man; it is not enough to be simply subordinate. Richard must learn to ask his hatred and true feelings to be able to survive. Richards at in whatever unfavorable circumstances though he lives, still wishes to learn and set goals for himself.

Richard, again, takes the job of a helper in a drugstore. However, without knowing the right words to say to his white boss, he loses his job soon enough. He grows more conscious of the roles that other Black Boys assume in their jobs. Soon, Richard takes a job as a hall boy at the same hotel where Bob Greenty, a black had worked. At his job, Richard socializes with the other black workers One night , when walking one of the maids home, the white man slaps her on her buttock "As we passed the white night watch man, he slapped her playfully on her buttock. I turned around amazed, The girl twisted out of his reach, tossed her head saucily, and went down the hallway" (217).

To avoid confrontation, Richard must obey the security guard and ignore the sleep. Determined to make more money to go to North, Richard decides to sacrifice his morals and begins to bootleg liquor to sell to white prostitutes and involves in scamming tickets. Quickly, he amasses enough money to move out on his own.

These events represent a pivotal moment in Richard's life because he realizes that in order to survive in the south he must obey the whites rather than challenge those who suppress him. It is then that he realizes in order to accomplish his goals; he must leave for the North:

And I knew that the very nature of black and white relations bred this constant theory ... But I, who stole nothing, wanted to look them straight in the face, who wanted to talk and act like a man, inspired fear in them. The southern whites would rather have had Negroes who stole, work for them than Negroes who knew, however dimly, the worth of their own humanity. Hence, whites placed a premium upon black deceit. They encouraged irresponsibility, and their rewards were bestowed upon blacks in the degree that we could make them feel safe and superior. (219)

Richard comes to realize the social cycle in the relationship between whites and blacks. The black workers that Richard observes fall into stealing and cheating because they feel justified by the poor treatment they receive from their white bosses. In turn, the white bosses feel justified in their racist attitude by black workers who cheat and steal:

Richard, completely tired of his life in South, now leaves for north and in November 1925; he arrives in Memphis, Tennessee ready to live on his own. He walks down, Beale Street a street notorious for its bad reputation- until he sees a large house with a sign that says, "Rooms" (228). Not knowing whether it is a boarding house or a where house, he is hesitant to enter until a large mulatto beckons him to come inside Although Mrs. Moss and Bess, the woman and her daughter express compassion and love toward Richard , he regards them with a kind of contempt. Similar to the plantation slaves that Richard has encountered in his previous job as an insurance agent's assistant, Mrs. Moss and Bess are simple and uneducated, almost to the point of ignorance. Do they realize what is happening in the world around them? From Richard's point of view, the mother and daughter pair seems to be in the world of their own. With a house of their own, they can afford to live comfortably. Wright never portrays Mrs. Moss or Bess as afraid-or even aware-of the racial bias of the South.

Richard thus makes a thorough examination of the consciousness of blacks and whites in the south. The blacks themselves suffer from a sense of inferiority and inability to revolt against the whites' exploitation instead they are accustomed to enjoy, their ill treatment. However, Richard, as a conscious black cannot bear the discrimination, leaves south, and goes to North when he can breathe the air of relief.

IV. WRIGHT'S EFFORTS TO RECONSTRUCT HIS SELF

Every piece of art reflects society. No art can be set apart from the social circumstances. The literary works of various periods portray the life style, culture and human civilization. In the representation of life, a work of art goes much deeper than one's sight reaches at a glance. Richard Wright, one of the renowned twentieth century black writers, cannot remain an exception. He, as in many of his novels, attempts to portray the miseries of blacks and an individual's attempt to overcome their in his well-known novel *Black Boy*.

Black Boy is an account, which records the childhood and youth of Richard himself. The novel, as the title suggests, presents a typical black boy who is struggling to create his identity going beyond the black stereotypes and fighting against the ill treatment of whites in white dominated community. Richard in his childhood is fighting against the black authority. This family environment is never in his favor. His grandmother is a hardcore Christian who wants him to visit the church on every Sundays. But Wright, an atheist, hardly agrees to go to church. When he is enrolled to a religious school for study, he always violates the norms that his aunt forcefully imposes upon him.

Another level of Richard's resistance within black race can be seen in his fighting against his own companion. The first days at any new school are very shocking. He must fight with them to make a companionship and win their trust. Though *Black Boy* presents an individual's miseries and sorrows caused by black authority, much prominent is his rebellious attitude towards whites. Wright starts becoming conscious and grows as rebellious figure involved in fighting against the whites. When he knows that the blacks in south are treated

as animals, he plans to start a campaign to chase the whites from south but his struggle does not get an adequate support by the other blacks. Instead, he is warned of meeting some penalty if the whites come to know his role.

Wright also points out the reasons for being unsuccessful to start a rebellion in South. The illiteracy, poverty and hunger become the characteristics of black life in the south. The basic need of food cannot be supplied unless the blacks work in white man's house. Wright himself is obliged to do the same thing in order to meet the need. They are paid some pennies for working in white people's houses by which they can some how manage their needs.

Though Wright works for white people, he gives up the job very soon after he knows that the whites are cheating them. For example when he knows that he is working for Ku Klux Klan by selling the magazine, he curses himself and gives up the job. Giving up one job and joining new job at other place helps Richard to generalize about the whites in south. However gentle and civilized they are, they are crooked in their notion about the blacks. They have nurtured a slavish attitude towards them. They want to purchase the blacks as people purchase animals.

Wright, while staying in the South, comes to know about the life in north through his reading of books. Soon, he plans to move to the North for which he works for whites ignoring all their exploitations and imagining his new life in the North.

Thus, Wright, in writing an autobiography, is not limited to present the problems faced by himself. He writes the history of blacks in South. Poverty,

suffering and orthodox nature are the prime characteristics of black people living in South. The possessive nature of white people, their exploitation and cheating compel Wright to be a rebellious black figure. Hence, Wright never wears the mask that a stereotypical black is supposed to wear. He discards the orthodox religious beliefs, leaves the religious education, and challenges the completely educational system by publishing a story. He wants to reconstruct his identity by objecting the values and norms imposed by black authority. More than the racial conflict, Wright also is a figure who attempts to construct himself, who fights against white races. He wants to get rid of racial exploitation and moves towards North where he assumes to achieve his aim.

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