

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

**Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*: Fictionalizing History
and Historicizing Fiction**

A Thesis

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This thesis titled "**Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage: Fictionalizing History and Historicizing Fiction***", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by **Dipak Raj Acharya** has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstracts

Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* is a classical slave narrative. By fictionalizing the slave narrative that looks like truth and as such the novel has deliberately been made the historical operation that is drawn from the real image of nineteenth century. The political ideas are about slavery, freedom, and contemporary status of African American people that Rutherford Calhoun fictionalizes. By fictionalizing the historical events Rutherford Calhoun presents that history once it takes form as words, can be view as a fiction.

By presenting Allmuseri, a miner group, lacks a unity of being. They dislike the property, simple to put on and feel guilt if they do wrong. Allmuseri is the minor community of black people in America. They are in search of their identity, history and existence not for their own but for all. They are concerned about their past that is compared in present and try to compare apply in the future. Therefore, the novel provides us as a fictionalization of history that is made on the base of historical facts.

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Chapter-I

General Introduction: Rewriting Slave Narrative

This research is an inquiry into Charles Johnson's novel *Middle Passage*. The inquiry basically proves how Johnson presents history in the form of fiction. By rewriting the slave narrative in the form of fiction that looks like truth. This novel, *Middle Passage*, is mirror of the history as fiction. The identity, history and historical accuracy are presented in the novel through the voice of narrative.

The novel depicts the political agenda of nineteenth century. Johnson's political commentary relates to the slavery, freedom and the contemporary status of African American people that reflects the real picture of nineteenth century. Johnson shows the reality of slavery and freedom in the form of imagination. The fiction is the source of imagination. The imagination collects the historical accuracy of slavery of American society. So Johnson writes the traditional slave narrative. By fictionalizing the historical events, Johnson suggests that history, once it takes form as words, can be view as a fiction (something which might or might not contain truths and omissions).

Winner of the 1990 National Book award for the novel *Middle Passage*, only the Second African American man to receive this honor, Charles Johnson is concerned that the complexity of African American truths has to be held yet. He argues that African American authors have been narrowed in their description of New World black life that instead of presenting its multiplicities and its underlying philosophical concerns, they have repeated observation of historians. As a result, Johnson has centered many African American realities through the support of

nineteenth century history. Johnson has created revision fables of traditional African American narratives and related them to a variety of philosophical constructs. Those fables are in the form of history. Historical events are presented in the form of fictional date that supports the fiction. The dates are taken from nineteenth century. The main purpose of Charles Johnson is to make clear the people in the days to come showing the situation of nineteenth century. Johnson tries to show what the reality and truth was through his imagination. Johnson recreates the history as a meaningful fiction so that he could save the perception and culture, identity and existence of the black.

Johnson has depicted the similar subject matter, which has already been raised by his contemporary African American writers. The issue is the historical and racial discourse. Except Charles Johnson, other contemporary African American writers show the historical possibility but Johnson here operates the historical dates those are true. History supports to create fiction. He takes the support of history but he fictionalizes the events from different ways. The events are true. The fiction is made from the source of historical background of African American slave narratives.

Johnson's *Middle Passage* is characterized by a strong interest in philosophy and history. Since, like other phenomena list, Johnson strongly believes that reality can be defined as a sum of many perceptions, he subjects the reconstruction of African American history and recreates the world of African American experience through different perspectives and possibilities. Indeed, while many writers are content with what is available in traditional literary conventions, Johnson is more interested in enriching contemporary American

literature by searching appropriate approaches and forms that can reclaim African Americans' sense of history and identity.

This novel, *Middle Passage* brings its epic scope and nineteenth century American sea-faring literature. The main character, Rutherford Calhoun, narrates the whole story, is a newly freed slave clipper bound for Africa, Calhoun has to fight off captain Ebenezer Falcon's "courtship" whose words are just as seductive as the nightmare of the god of Allmuseri is tormenting. Calhoun is the mouth speaker of Johnson's novel *Middle Passage* who is in meditation. His meditation is the quest for eternity.

Rutherford connects the loss of his father with the loss of any sense of personal history or familial ties. When his father left him, Riley Calhoun essentially eradicated Rutherford's relationship with his life, leaving deep wounds that the narrator does not address until he faces the image of his father soon after his conversation with Cringle. Rutherford is in the moan situation after his meeting with monster. He has chosen present itself to him in the form of the one man, his father, with whom he had bloody, unfinished business. Rutherford has spent most of his narrative running: running from the law in New Orleans, running from papa, running from Isabel. At the height of the peril at sea, Rutherford is forced to stop running. When he first sees the form of his father, Rutherford believes that he is silent to say anything, was to fall short of ever saying enough. Rutherford has obviously been deeply wounded by his father's decision to abandon his family, and he feels that nothing his father could say would make up for the loss that Rutherford has suffered. By the end of their encounter, however, Rutherford realizes that his father is and will always be, a part of him, hearing a mosaic of voices within voices, each one immanent in the others. He seemed his presence

everywhere that of countless others. At the moment, Rutherford finds himself and accepts his father as part of his past and present.

From the commencement of the novel, we see Rutherford in the ship that is his house. Other people who were known as slaves in the ship, they were without their own house. They were as refugees. There was not stability for them. They were living in this catastrophic situation. The situation was reminded here in the novel, is the real reflection of 1830. Johnson fictionalizes the scenario of the slave on the bases of history. Writing is a means of controlling self and controlling one's history, one's sense of loss.

Finally, Rutherford Calhoun faces his past and his deepest emotions. He finds his father as a monster. It is because his father was also a cause of the domination. They themselves felt hegemony and became passive followers. This moment in the novel prepares for the change that is revealed in Rutherford. Soon after, by facing his past Rutherford suggests the coming generation to be free in the future.

Rutherford and Peter Cringle share their histories with each other in the few calm moments before they know the republic will be torn apart. Trying to communicate Calhoun's feeling about his father to the first mate, Rutherford explains: "I don't even know who my father is... I have no family, traditions to maintain. In a way, I have no past" shows that Calhoun is in the search of his father". His father means does not only his predecessors but also what the history of them was. Rutherford connects the loss of his father with the loss of any sense of personal history.

After Calhoun's observation leads him to the conclusion that all forty crew members aboard the Republic are loners in search of a new place, Calhoun talks about them "refugees from responsibility and like social misfits ever pushing westward to escape citified life, took to the sea as the last frontier that welcomed miscreants, dreamers, and the fools". Calhoun comes to believe that he is searching for his self, but creating one despite captain Falcon's ominous talk about a person's "no self". Calhoun's broad knowledge in self-centered individualism makes it possible for him to play a game with both the captain and the other crewmembers. But after Calhoun betrays the Allmuseri captives by informing the captain of the god of the Allmuseri, Calhoun is tormented by a sense of guilt. After spending three days feeding the Allmuseri god and meeting his long-lost father himself, Calhoun believes that he has reached a new level of self-awareness. Reaching in the level of self-awareness is to be conscious person. A knowledgeable person can recognize what the reality was as well as present situation is now.

In *Middle Passage*, Johnson has followed the tradition of African American literature. Calhoun reminds the reader of Ralph Ellison's Rinehart in *Invisible man*, a character who has many personalities: Calhoun is at the same time a learned African American former slave, a pragmatic liar, a survival specialist, a wooer and the one who is being wooed. He thus becomes the ultimate symbol of history of life, and of America. In his novel, Calhoun has to learn how to balance the influence of both western culture (epitomized in the book by Captain Falcon's propensity to philosophize life) and the indigenous African culture, represented by the presence of the Allmuseri god to protect his emotional integrity and individuality. Sitting there in America, Afro - American people were obliged to sit

in betweenness there in America. Johnson has drawn the real reflection of the American society of nineteenth century.

Middle Passage concerns one sixty- six days sea battle, but the number nine recurs as the number of entities in the ship's log, which constitute chapter divisions in Johnson's convoluted narrative. The present time chronology of the sea mutiny evolves by log entries for "June 14, 1830"; "June 20, 1830"; "June 23, 1830"; "June 28, 1830"; "June 30, 1830"; "July 3, 1830"; the "same day"; "August 1, 1830"; and "August 20, 1830". Of course, Johnson's fictional sea accounts overtly signify on an actual historical event which is as "Indelible mark in history" the mutiny aboard the slave ship. Here in these dates, there is sea faring. Sea faring is the struggle. Transmitting from one place to another is for the search of existence and identity. This novel *Middle Passage* has been included the fix events they represent the whole history metaphorically. Calhoun differently repeats the migrant -to-resident pattern. He has tried to involve in American Revolution, but only because Calhoun's parents had been Northern peers of Blackman as colonial era slaves long before Calhoun's birth in Illinois in 1807. He gives specific information about his Manumission, migration, and arrival in New Orleans on May 23, 1829, a year prior to his shipping out for Africa. Calhoun initially feels no filial kinship to the motherland, but after the slave mutiny he becomes a surrogate father to an African child. In other words, the detachment is which Calhoun initially expresses towards Africa.

The singular and group conspiracies recur in *Middle Passage*. Falcon is a conspiring Commander who recruits Calhoun to aid him in conquering the mutinous white crewman who demands Calhoun's allegiance; the plotting group of

Allmuseri slaves led by Ngonyama also demands Calhoun's loyalty. During these shifts in power, Calhoun follows the lead of his military model.

The Battle of New Orleans recurs metaphorically in *Middle Passage* as Falcon's "Jacksonian" extermination of the Allmuseri slaves. The slaves' revolt in *Middle Passage* is more protracted, but equally lethal. It involves sorcery and begins slowly with inclement weather several days prior to June 11, 1830, when Calhoun becomes recorder of the Mutiny. Eventually, however, Falcon acts with Jacksonian resolve to decimate everyone, including himself by suicide. Calhoun, Squibb the Cook, and three African children are the only survivor of the revolt. Johnson has depicted the history of nineteenth century, 1830. It means he has given the date that was in the time of his father. After that, there is a great change in the concept of Afro-American people. They are ready to do any work for their freedom. But till in the previous generation, Black people were only following what the history, rule and concept was made. They were blind supporter, followed the rule regulation of white. Really, there was the pathetic situation in the life of blacks. But the coming generation of the black is totally different. Rutherford Calhoun is an example of coming generation. He is ready to create his existence and identity himself so there are the vast differences between the period of his father and him. It means there is the generation gap. The new generation cannot bear the pathetic condition that is caused by the power of whites. So, Johnson creates the history through imagination. The history which had created the difficult situation to the afro American people, Johnson tries to create here, fictionalizing the events of past that aware the both black and white people.

In the reality, the 1830 census revealed that only 3,775 free blacks, about two percent of the total free black population, owned 12, 760 slaves. Black

slaveholders were a tiny minority. Although most of these black slave owners were in the South, some also lived in Rhode island, Illinois, New York and Border States. Some blacks owned other slaves for humanitarian purposes. One minister, for instance, bought slaves and then enabled them to purchase their freedom from him on easy terms. Most often, black slaveholders were free blacks who bought their own family members with the express purpose of later freeing them. But many blacks engaged in slavery for purely selfish rather than humanitarian reasons. First of all, Calhoun also shows his attitude towards the benefit of himself that he changes at last and as a result achieves the goal in favor of blacks.

So, Johnson fictionalizes the history of 1830 that was true. So Johnson depicts the real subject matter that has fictionalized. In the novel, all the events come in imagination. Imagination is a fantasy but the fantasy is based on historical accuracy. So it is real as well true. He has tried to search the minor events of day by day. The subject matter here is presented about the history of slavery so history becomes fiction that history is fictionalized.

The present research has been divided into four parts. The first chapter presents a brief study of *Middle Passage*. It presents an introductory outline of the present study. The second chapter tries briefly to explain the theoretical modality that is going to be applied in this research. It explains shortly on historiographic metafiction with the intellectual and historical background. On the basis of the theoretical modality outlined in second chapter, the third chapter analyses the literacy text *Middle Passage*. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the research on the basis of textual analysis in chapter three.

Charles Johnson *Middle Passage* has summoned much criticism since its publication in 1990. Many critics, scholars and novelist have analyzed from racist

discourse, post-colonial, double-consciousness, searching of identity and mythical perspectives. These approaches - no matter whether they are author oriented or reader oriented or language oriented - have tried to interpret it or invest this novel with meaning. The approach of present research is a distinct one in the sense that the present research analyzes historiographic metafiction vision deployed in the novel as a fictionalizing history and historicizing fiction.

S.X. Goudie discusses several of the racist discourses that influence Charles Johnson's writing especially in *Middle Passage*. He clarifies that *Middle Passage* as a racist discourse "*Middle Passage*, however, certainly does speak to the experience of some of those thirty million people and to the experience of many white readers as well" (29). The critic shows that history of blacks begins from the racist discourse.

Homi K. Bhabha, comments on the novel from postcolonial perspective. He focuses on how the slave-master relationship plays into literature about Africa. He critically examines on how freedom and the character's struggle for the culture are central issues. He claims *Middle Passage* as an example of postcolonial writing. "*Middle Passage* is the voice coming from this focus on an enunciation through the time-log and into modernity. Johnson's feats in part, consist of the fictional activation of collective cultural memory; but mainly, it is a new imagining of what occurred in the gaps of or hegemonic historiography. Rutherford Calhoun experiences a particular colonialist and post colonialist and by imagining this moment in time, by "damming the stream of real life ... [and] bringing the flow to a stand still in a reflux of astonishment" (253).

Virginia Walty Smith regards the criticism of the book as a document of double consciousness. "Calhoun acquisition and dispensation of poly history

derives from his rebirth experience with the Allmuseri who literary posses double consciousness having one brain in the heads and another in their spines” (42).

Smith also examines “a troop of double consciousness occurs as Calhoun becomes translator and descriptor of Falcon’s text, which is infused with real and fictional knowledge” (15). Smith has emphasized to observe the novel from the double consciousness perspective. This very perspective seems in the context of the central character, Rutherford Calhoun.

Daniel Scott examines, the novel *Middle Passage* as the search of identity which scrutinizes (examines) the structures of identity writing in the re-configuration of the self, “Johnson questions the structures of human and literary identity by testing the capabilities of binary opposition, dualism, and abstractions into contain meaning and experience: our faith in fiction comes from as ancient belief that language and literary art all speaking and showing - clarify our experience” (being 3).

In the same vein, Ashraf Rushdy argues *Middle Passage* outlines phenomenological perspectives “the idea of inter-subjectivity includes the condition of the individual’s being on position in the world, of each person having a relationship with the tribal community” (373). Both of the critic’s criticism highlight that *Middle Passage* focuses on the people’s position how they are living and what the reality is in front of them.

Walby Celestin views Rutherford’s Journey with the Barbara mythology “his turugu ego world, sacrifices his Seth Ian self becomes food for the Allmuseri god, and learns to “transfigure all ... make ... peace with the recent past by turning it into world” (190). Walby makes clear that the description of Allmuseri god depicts the real myth of Barbara.

The above mentioned reviews and criticisms indicate that, though the novel can be dealt from various perspectives such as racist discourse, post-colonial, double consciousness, existential searching of identity and mythical and so on, the perspective which I have chosen to conduct a research is a distinct one - fictionalizing history and historicizing fiction that shows how the fiction is true, relates to the reality.

This research will analyze how Johnson's *Middle Passage* provides the fictional history that relates to the reality. The slave narrative is reflected in central character's narrative voice, representation, activities, consciousness and determination in the novel. To interpret this novel from historiographic metafiction perspective, various ideas will be critically analyzed in the succeeding chapters.

Chapter-II

Theoretical Approach to Hutcheon's Historiographic Metafiction

This research is an inquiry into Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* from the historiographic metafiction perspective. So the researcher's attempt in this research work is to use historiographic metafiction as a tool to analyze the novel. For doing so, this study will specify on historiographic ideas deployed in *Middle Passage*. Therefore, historiographic metafiction as a tool will be essential while analyzing Johnson's *Middle Passage*, fictionalizing history and historicizing fiction. So, in this chapter, various ideas raised by different groups of historicist critics such as English, British and French are going to be critically analyzed. Before doing this, a brief critical introduction on historiographic metafiction is going to be given in this chapter.

Before interpreting *Middle Passage* in the light of historiographic metafiction, it would be better that this study should make a cursory examination of the basic tents of the theory because this would help the study to confine itself to its limits and avoid going beyond what theory does not conform.

What is Historiographic Metafiction?

Historiographic metafiction is a term Hutcheon uses to define the postmodern novel, especially those novels set in the past which are used to show the plot structures and characterization techniques of popular fiction, interesting to analyze yet because they use parody and irony to challenge those very technique with in the text. These types of postmodern fictions are marked by a concern with "whose truth gets told" in historical and fictional narratives. Since, in the words of

Hayden White, “every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications”. It is the revision of the narrative histories of American Slavery and of the *Middle Passage* is similar, what these narratives means for us today, and what they should mean. Hutcheon Stresses how important black American literature has been to “this postmodern refocusing on historicity,” Such as Toni Morrison and Ishmael Reed; we need to add Charles Johnson to this group of postmodern novelist who are effectively challenging and changing the Carmen of American literature by asking us to reread and revision of American classics.

Post modernist works usually challenge, “Received version of history” and reminds us that history itself is an unreliable narrative construction. Charles Johnson’s fiction offers a mixture of positive themes in historiographic metafiction. Johnson shows how the stripping away of the illusion of an autonomous self - that “self” itself is a textual construct, a recurring theme in post modernist writing - need not result in alienation, personal despair, and disintegration. Johnson sees the rejection of the autonomous self as a positive step, providing a refreshing change from those postmodern texts in which characters most simply endure the unendurable. Johnson takes historiographic metafiction as a step beyond merely questioning the authenticity of the narratives past. He describes the past that speaks to our current social and moral problems with a voice that not only asks pertinent questions, but also offers some answers to our most pressing late twenty- Century social and personal ills. He considers a rarity - a postmodern work that is also a celebration of life. Most of the post modern novels tend to undermine “the twin goals of the classical realist novel - an object of love and work as a sphere of life - affirming work to fill the emptiness left after he has disgorged himself of his ego.

In *Middle Passage*, Johnson incorporates the plot structure and themes of genres such as the epic, the romance, the Sea Story and the slave narrative. The most effective way of fiction is to appreciate age. An old form of the epic and the pastoral is the effective for the historiographic fiction because by virtue of there having been in circulation for centuries. New fictions have the authority lacking in so much interior modern literature. Meaning accumulates in the form, infuses these fiction with the conscious distancing of irony, parody and even force. In fact, the accessibility of Johnson's third published novel is due to its having many of the characteristics of force which according to Albert Bernal, "is by its nature popular: It makes a gut appeal to the entire spectrum of the public, from literates to intellectuals" (14).

As in many forces, Rutherford Calhoun is the picaresque hero of *Middle Passage*. Soon he finds himself "on unfamiliar terrain where Calhoun appears odd and out numbered", where "he is different from everybody else" (Bernal 24) In this case, only the black American on a merchant ship is setting out to pick up an illegal Cargo of African slaves, a ship commandeered by a ruthless and comically bigoted Captain. All characters in the novel, including Rutherford are essentially caricatures grotesque. As a philosopher, Johnson does not believe that fictional characters can represent real people. In *Being and Race*, he agrees with the philosopher William Gas, who holds that "there are no descriptions in fiction, there are only constructions." (Johnson 34). Johnson insists that a character is not a person. He is not even an object of perception, and nothing whatever that is appropriate to persons; can be correctly said of a character. Thus Johnson seems to agree with the" contemporary critical maxim that realism is really a set of

conventions, that the representation of the real is not the same as the real itself' (Hutcheon, "Historiographic" 6).

Most historiographic metafiction constantly reminds readers that they are not in a realistic novel by temporal leaps, abrupt shifts in narrative voice harsh juxtaposition of genre, unmistakable periodic self-reflexivity, and other techniques, which Johnson himself employed in his 1982 novel *Oxherding Tale*. However, *Middle Passage*, while employing many of these techniques in subdued ways, also invites the uninitiated to participate in an uninterrupted narrative line, guiding readers over the abyss of post modernism on the bridge of an adventure plot which on one level is as riveting, unlikely, and as ironic as George Lucas's *Raiders of the lost Ark*. The narrative line takes most students and they don't perceive the characters as stereotypes because they are so used to this type of characterization that they take it at face value. Recognizing parody involves "not only the recognition of sexualized traces of the literary and historical past but also the awareness of what has been done through irony to those traces" (Hutcheon "Historiography" 8).

Middle Passage is enjoyable on the plot level; yet textualizing the novel provides a key to open the tiny door of post modernism, a door that reveals a post and unusual space. Therefore Johnson's novel along with several of its inter texts allows for discussion of how Johnson has both used and challenged past texts, by casting, for example of a former slave, petty thief and womanizer as Odysseus to a Penelope ex-school teacher who knits sweaters for her menageries of stray animals.

Middle Passage is in the form of periodic intertextuality. Periodic intertextuality is the very basis of historiographic metafiction. Post modernist works

that incorporates characters, images, structures, or themes from earlier works and change our understanding of those works. Therefore, appreciating historiographic metafiction requires awareness of the important inter texts, those "primary utterances that are being distorted and redefined by being relocated within another linguistic and cultural context" (Worsten and Still 11). Parody of inter texts is not simple ridiculing of past fictional plots and techniques, but also "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (Hutcheon, poetics 26). Received histories and time-honored narrative structures are placed in a new context and made to speak in our age to a new audience, with startlingly different connotations. For Johnson this parody is never a devaluating of past beliefs, but more a change in point of view so that perspectives are textualized previously.

This novel begins with explicit references to Melville's *Moby-Dick* but with a periodically anachronistic first person narrator and with a Snappy contemporary prose style, which no one can mistake for the prose of the 1830s. Johnson hangs his philosophical tale on a familiar plot. However, this stock comic character is made to play the leading role in a slave narrative, a narrative about the *Middle Passage* as well as about a former slave. Ashraf Rushdy, for instance, classifies this book as a text "which imitates the form and convention of the slave narrative" (*Phenomenology of the Allmuseri* (375).

Johnson's use of the slave narrative tradition is neither straightforward nor strictly parody: it seems not only to parody but also actually to invest the structure of the classic slave narrative. While the narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass adopts a highly serious, melodramatic emotional rhetoric, *Middle Passage* undercuts and puts into question not only concerning the style and tone of the slave

narrative but also about its very foundation of progression from the dark night of slavery to the glorious day of freedom. Rutherford is an ex-slave who discovers that his freedom is only different types of slavery. In the first few pages of the novel, Rutherford refers to “the hour of my manumission” as “a day of such gloom and depression” that he cannot bear to speak of it (3). Gaining his freedom has only trapped him further in the futile struggle to preserve and promote his individuality. Running from the disappointment, his brother Jackson was also a cause to escape. As well, running from marriage with Isadora was another cause to escape. Rutherford puts away on a ship full of white men who like him, are running from their failures and humiliation on shore to a worse fate at sea, Peter Cringle is the first mate, informs him immediately that “Being on a ship is being in jail, while the chance of being drowned to boot” about slavery and freedom will be turned on its head during his middle passage. It is the progression from America to Africa before returning to different ideas of Rutherford with a totally different idea of freedom, into the bondage of marriage and responsibility with Isadora.

We find Johnson’s using the plot structure of slave narrative to support the theme that slavery is a state of mind. Johnson is only taking Douglass’s theme to their ultimate logical conclusion for today’s reading audience, Jet, who is not and never have been slaves. While Douglass’s main motive was the abolition of the legal enslavement of the body. Johnson expands on Douglass to show how his narrative can speak to our late-twentieth century social problems.

In fact Douglass’s narrative touches on the concept of slavery as a state of mind as well as legal state of the body. Douglass’s narrative progresses from the dusk of birth as a slave is through the deep height of complete mental and spiritual bondage to the brilliant light of physical freedom. Rutherford Calhoun’s spiritual

journey takes us in the opposite direction. Rutherford, like Fredrick Douglass, was born into slavery, but was granted his manumission by his dying owner, Peleg Chandler, before the opening of the narrative. We learn that Rutherford's manumission has not allowed him to be happy and self-directed, but has instead led him to a life of petty crime, drink, womanizing, and running from commitment of any kind. Rutherford writes "Since my manumission I'd brought a world of grief on myself" (92). We learn that Rutherford has rejected his brother Jackson Calhoun as a hopeless uncle Tom, a sort of spiritual idiot who so rejects the idea of ownership that when Chandler asks him to decide how he wants the inheritance divided, he replies "I could ask for land, but how can any man even you sir, own something like those trees outside?" (117). The implication is that Jackson never felt that Chandler owned him, because ownership is just a misguided figment of the imagination. Therefore he was voluntarily serving Chandler, as Rutherford and all the rest of Chandler were dependents.

A slave's voluntary servitude to a good master is a favored theme of anti-abolitionist writers, not of ex-slaves in slave narratives. Johnson compares the presence of Jackson Calhoun, the slave who freely chooses to serve his master after manumission. Jackson's initial presence reminds us that he is a Christ figure, and he is described in magical realist term as a sort of Francis of Assisi who is so selfless and light that he can lie down on a flock of birds and be carried into the sky. When Jackson insists that their master split the inheritance equally among all of his slaves and ex-slave, they're off spring and relatives (leaving Rutherford to inherit only \$ 40.00, a bed pan, and a Bible). Rutherford becomes a thief, stealing the principle that he himself has had his own identity stolen from him and therefore he has the right to steal other's property, security, and sense of self. In the end, the

middle passage and Isadora Bailey will teach him that he doesn't need material possessions or a stolen sense of self to be a free and happy man. As often true in historiographic metafiction, this insight seems much more relevant to American readers in the 1990s than to any actual or fictional black person, slave or free, were living in the United States of America in 1830.

Rutherford learns in his voyage that the more men try to escape the bonds of others, the more trapped they become in bondage to their own egos; more over, according to Johnson, no man is truly free of bonds to the entire social universe of others. Even Captain Falcon, the arch-investor who has financed this voyage: "I'm captain 'cause I know how to bow and scrape and kiss rich arises to raise money for this run," he informs Rutherford (147). Rutherford is forced to acknowledge that Ebenezer Falcon is slave to the investors, who in turn are slaves to fortune hunters. By the end of the novel, Rutherford has come to acknowledge that his brother Jackson Calhoun was, while still a slave, the freest man he had ever known and Rutherford himself is rid of the need to "possess or dominate" his own life or the world (187).

Seeking the way to escape from his past, Rutherford discovers that he has not only misunderstood but also misused that past. When Allmuseri god shows Rutherford that his father was killed just miles from the Lavation on the day that he escaped and in fact did not abandon Rutherford for worldly pleasures. Rutherford realizes that one of his own excuses for his antisocial, irresponsible life style is a figment of his imagination, an imaginary enemy he has kept alive so that he can keep on hating it just as Diamelo, one of the Allmuseri slave revolt leaders. Captain Falcon must keep alive in order to have an enemy. He can both hate and control. Rutherford thought an uncaring father who sought only his own liberty had

abandoned him, but he now learns that his uneducated father was incapable of escaping and not guilty of abandoning his family.

While writing a slave narrative in 1990, Johnson asks readers, black and white to re-examine their relationship to American slavery. It shows that Frederick Douglass's narrative tells only half the story. The escape from slavery was the event, which began Douglass's life, but Rutherford was given his freedom, as we readers have had given to us. The institution of slavery can no longer function as an excuse for any type of antisocial behavior. Rutherford's father, a slave taken to Africa, parodies stereotypical late twentieth-Century black lower-class excuses based on the past (distant or not); a womanizer, braggart, and never do well. Riley Calhoun believes he can't help the way he is:

Looka how we liven, he'd say...Looka what they done to us...we was kings once, he would say' scrawling with one finger on the dusty perch a crude map of an African Village he remembered vaguely (and neglecting to add that in his tribe his own family was not royalty but instead the equivalent of Russian serfs or Chinese coolies)." We lost a war-naw, a battle. So now we's prisoners. And the way I see it we supposed to keep on fightin. (169-70)

Riley Calhoun takes out his anger on other blacks, including his family, and feels that any constraints on his freedom, including marriage and religion, are imposed by whites. Rutherford had thought of him as the epitome of the irresponsible absent father, someone who ran away from slavery but forgot to come back for his children. The anachronistic style and the allusion to current problems, such as fatherless family units, allow us to understand that the issues addressed in the novel are problems, which exist now. Historiographic metafiction

always” reshapes [the past] in the light of present issues” (Hutcheon, poetics 137). Johnson accepts the post modern idea that we know the past only through its texts, and only through our own modern mind, but he takes post modernism one step further. Rather than simply problematizing the understanding of past, Johnson insists that, if our interpretation of the past is causing us present anguish and social problems, we need to reinterpret that past. In such a way that it will benefit us in the present. In other words, Johnson does not really care how a slave in 1890 would react to being abandoned by his father. His concern is how readers in the 1990s (black and white) react to such events, and with what consequences to themselves and society.

Rutherford must not only accept that his father did not purposely abandoned Calhoun, he must also acknowledge that his father’s excuses. His brother Jackson is closer to being an Allmuseri rather than Rutherford or his father. Ngonyama, the captive who best retains the Allmuseri world view, roundly chastises him for his hangdog attitude: “None of us were brought up to accept failure, or laugh it off, as you do... we were forced onto this ship. Why have you wandered so far from you home?” (Middle passage 163. Illustrating the Buddhist idea of Karma or what Johnson in this book calls the Allmuseri concept of “out picturing” Ngonyama believes that the ship is doomed because the rebel slave slaves have allowed themselves to kill so many of the whites who allowed themselves to become contaminated with the murderous dualism of western mind.

Johnson has inscribed into the Allmuseri mind and set many classical Buddhist beliefs, such as the belief that even though we are inherited. We are inclined to divide our entire experience into two parts, what we do and what happens to us, this belief is greatest illusion. Buddhists hold that what happens to

us is our “Karma” and “karma” is a Sanskrit word which means “doing”.

Therefore, according to the doctrine of the Buddha, what happens to us, as well as what we do, is fundamentally our doing (Buddhism, Man and Nature).

Rutherford learns that he has himself created all of the mythical past, which has circumscribed his life the myth of an uncaring father under the myth of a servile and spineless brother, the myth of having no self and no history and no stake in America. “I was responsible for all of it, the beauty and the ugliness,” he comes to recognize (181). He learns that “the ‘I’ that I was, was a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time. What I felt, seeing this, was indebtedness” (163). Calhoun also feels as intense desire to return to the America he has repudiated, because he has learned that he is no better and no worse than any other American of any color or race or class “if this weird, upside down caricature of a country called America, if this land of refuges and former indentured servants, religious heretics and half-breeds, whoresons and fugitives-this cauldron of mongrels from all points on the compass was all I could rightly call home, then aye: I was of it” (179).

Frederick Douglass believed that the purpose of slavery was to force slaves to forget that they were individuals, or to prevent them from ever achieving an individual identity, a theme repeated in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. All effective propaganda asks us to see the world in black and white “us” vs. “them”. Johnson’s thematic purpose is entirely the opposite. Rutherford learns that he has everything in common with those he felt had oppressed and betrayed him and that the enemy he was fighting and running from was, in fact, a part of himself.

Rutherford, who has been industriously stealing the reward of other’s toil from their purses, learns that it may be time for him to contribute to society

instead of filching from it. Douglass's "person-house of slavery" (305). Johnson has made, a prison house of language-our construction of the past had limited our opportunities in the present. Thus Johnson has inverted the form and the theme of the slave narrative to make it serve a late twentieth-century purpose. Rutherford rejects mindless sensation seeking. He learns self-respect, self-sacrifice, and the value of accepting responsibility and stability.

In *Middle passage*, the rebellious slaves openly articulate their motives. Johnson has also made explicit the brutal conditions, which led slaves to revolt, making impossible the interpretation of "Benito Cereno" of Melville that takes the Spanish captain as the innocent victim of an evil and unprovoked uprising. But most importantly Johnson has challenged Melville's theme that the Malign evil is inherent in mankind, and therefore one group will always oppress another throughout history, even through the oppressors and the oppressed will change place periodically.

The character that comes closest to Melville's worldview in Johnson's novel is Ebenezer Falcon, the ultimate American. Falcon believes that "as long as each sees a situation differently there will be slaughter and slavery and the subordination of one to another's cause two notions of things never exist side by side as equals. And it is the winning belief that's true and the conqueror whose vision is veritable" (97). What's about the Moe, Falcon believes that there is no hope for peace in the world because dualism is bloody structure of the mind. Subject and object, the perceiver and the perceived, self and other-these ancient twins are built into mind like the stem-piece of merchant mas. Calhoun describes "They are signs of a transcendental Fault, a deep crack in Consciousness itself.

Mind was made for murder. "Slavery, if you think this through, forcing yourself not to flinch, is the social correlate of a deeper, ontic wound (98).

Rutherford can think no defense against Falcon's dark counsel and arguments, "Falcon convinces him that fighting between groups is inevitable, and therefore swings wildly among the there different groups on the ship- the Allmuseri, the mutineers, and Falcon's supporters- hoping to end up on the winning side. But by the end of the book he has realized that there is set another way to make peace. He realizes that the self that he gets as in mortal combat with everyone else is itself a figment of his imagination. Falcon, who is "immune to heaven". Cannot lose his self, his ego and ends up shooting himself in the head as the only way to escape being a slave once the Allmuseri take over the ship. He can not step out of the Hegelian master/slave relationship without killing his body as well as his self-identity, through a series of grotesque and symbolic actions which include not only a near death experience but also vomiting an " afterbirth or a living thing aborted from the body-something foul and shaped like the African god, as if its homunculus had been growing inside me" (178). The African god's name he has already realized is Rutherford.

So Johnson inverts another American Classic yet, showing that there is a way out of the revolving cycle of the oppressor and the oppressed. Johnson confronts the basic existential problem of our age- how to be neither the victim nor the executioner and its answer is a call to reinvent our perceptions of our slaves and others. It is because the history we choose to tell ourselves will shape our future. Johnson's *Middle Passage* insists that we continue striving to be neither victim nor executioner. On all three sides of the fracas, characters like Falcon and Diamelo who believe that might is right and murder is justifiable end up killing

themselves and destroying that fragile ship, the Republic, upon which all must depend for survival. Johnson, like Melville, shows that no one is inherently victim or inherently an executioner but that all too often the victim becomes the executioner. Even though, Rutherford is no saint after his Voyage-he blackmails papa Zeringue providing for the support of the three Allmuseri children who have survived the sinking of the Republic-he himself does not desire revenge, power, status, or even sex with the now willing Isadora, because “desire was too much of a wound, a rip of insufficiency and incompleteness that kept us, despite our proximity, constantly apart, like metals with an identical charge ” (208). Rutherford has become similar to Reb the coffin-maker in Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale*-able to act in the world without in turn being acted upon, because as the soul catcher puts it in that novel, the man who desires nothing for himself “Can’t be Caught he’s already free” (173).

We will find new and different paths leading out from Johnson’s novel to historical, philosophical and fictional inter texts, and different ways to relate the novel to the current American historical moments. This is a rich novel, is also so readable and enjoyable is certainly that all is meaningless: God only knows that when we reach Hegel’s end of history and all meanings are known, this nightmarish sense that we are locked into victimization. It may be when we look back the truth but the social payoff this grim perception, particularly when it smothers all other in a fiction (or life) is, as Gardner wrote, immoral. We are responsible for the way the world appears before us for its depth and richness. If we are open to others or its poverty, we aren't and for the impact our vision has on others.

Chapter-III

Implication of Slave Narrative in Johnson's *Middle Passage*

Charles Johnson's novel, *Middle Passage* presents a story from the mouth speaker, Rutherford Calhoun, Central character of the novel. He presents the whole story from the viewpoint of racial discourse that depicts the fictional history. The narrative of Rutherford Calhoun is slave narrative in the sense that the whole narration is dominated by Rutherford Calhoun's consciousness that is a freed slave. As a result, *Middle Passage* is placed in the slave narrative tradition, a tradition that concerns individual growth in spite of tremendous odds and contains explicit political agenda.

However, after reading the novel, one wonders to what extent the story leads character; Rutherford Calhoun develops him into different form, changes and assumedly better person. Furthermore, to the end is Johnson's political commentary concerning slavery, freedom and the contemporary status of African men and women. Johnson rewrites the traditional slave narrative, filling in a number of interpersonal, philosophical gaps whose absence are proved in the origins and distinction between what is written and over written for positive or sinister ends. Johnson is also interested in the nature of writing and creation to produce. By the fictionalizing a historical event, he suggests that history once takes form as words, can be view as a fiction (something which might or might not contain truths and commissions).

The interest of Johnson goes beyond recovering history, for he demonstrates that by fictionalizing historical events, he can assume power over

them. Hence, he demonstrates that history is fiction. Johnson apparently believes that by producing a fiction that looks like truth. He overwrites those historical fictions they look like truth of the classical slave narratives. Just as the central character, Calhoun overwrites the captain's logbook; Johnson overwrites the tradition of the slave narrative and historical writing about slavery that claims to be true.

Johnson revises this tradition through an understanding of the historical self and the historical text. In his work, Johnson has shown the great interest-debunking notion of racial and cultural difference; we are essentially connected with one another and with one another's ancestors, in spite of any apparent differences. In his critical prose study *Being and Race*, Johnson claims:

Any one knowledgeable about genetics ... can so you that if you go back fifty generations in the life of any person, he or she shares of common ancestor with every other person on this planet. None of us can be less closely related than 50th cousins.

When we trace the gene back to A.D. 700, race dissolves (43).

Johnson later poetically notes If we go deeply enough into a relative perspective, black or white, male or female, we encounter the transcendence of relativism. The phrase logically proves that since all being and its predecessor's text comments on its predecessors is. In turn, it can currently shape each. Therefore Johnson simply tries not to write a slave-like narrative, but rather to open up his novel to all other slave narratives and texts hence the novel's reliance on literary, historical and philosophical allusion and the incorporation of character from Herman Melville's novella, *Benito Careno*. In the novel, text and character emerge as a process of consciousness building and meta-awareness.

Rutherford is told by Cringle after shortly commencing his seafaring excursion that "3/4s of the world surface... is covered by that formless Naught, and I dislike it, Calhoun, being hemmed in by nothing, this bottomless chaos breeding all manner of monstrosities and creatures that defy civilized law" (42). This postmodern interest in nihilism, in the sense of universal purposelessness, seems especially prescient Johnson's vision of human interconnectedness and considering the absurdity the reality of slavery yet.

Johnson attempts to contradict pervasive chaos with the very nature of slave trading, broken families, confusing rides on the sea. Language barrier is through his imposition and redefinition of the significance of home. *Middle Passage* reflects the classical slave narratives in apparent insistence on the importance of locating a home as a center of identity and ownership. It is difficult to understand how a freed or escaped slave could ever feel fully at home after having experienced forced dislocation; so when Rutherford says to himself, discussing in New Orleans early in the novel, "Here Rutherford is home" (2), It can tend to think that he will not call New Orleans home for all that long. Home is surely a tenuous notion for many slaves. It becomes an absolute heaven for Calhoun, which is, however, soon to be an uncertain heaven. Home is the basic requirement for each that lacks the stability of the characters in the novel. Home remains for Calhoun a possibility, if it is never a full of realization of stability and unity. It is a relative term however for a freeman Calhoun must call if only temporarily, the grotesque republic his home. This ship stands as a reminder if Calhoun's past of the collective post of herded slaves.

By the end of the novel, Calhoun accepts home as being a destabilized concept and certainly a relative term. Before the rescue of the Republic Cargo,

Calhoun states, "I desperately dreamed of home... If this weird, upside-down caricature of a country called America, if this land of refugees-this Caldron of mongrels from all I rightly call home, then age: I was of it" (179). Calhoun's claim is of being amounts to an inter subjective acceptance of the pains of all history, the history is all of his ancestors. Here he resembles most a slave taken-in a dazed state, with no concept of time-from his home. Calhoun has shown proof that he can go beyond his solipsistic obsession with physical sensation and sensual titillation. An idea of comfort home becomes an acceptance of multiplicity, decent redness.

Some of the more salient issues concerning the ways, which the novel reflects and comments on the slave narratives is worthwhile to consider Rutherford's very contemporary and unique narration. Calhoun is a likeable rogue but his wanton but his wanton roguishness and recent history ought to alter us to the unreliability of his narrative. As Marc Steinberg claims, "Rutherford's reliability becomes especially compromised as a result of the suffering he has witnessed upon a boat, raising questions, in essence, about his seafaring vision" (4). Rutherford carefully calls his own retelling of the story of the Republic a narrative not a biography, life history, or recounting of an actual event. The term's connotation takes on further meaning when considering that slave narrative were so frequently underwritten by abolitionist interest (hence, calling into question their own veracity as historical documents). Early on, Calhoun sets himself of as being potentially unreliable: "My master, Reverent Peleg Chandler, had noticed this stickiness of fingers win I was a child, and a tendency had to tell tretosterous lies for the hell of it" (3). As Calhoun enters the Republic, he stats, "I had an odd sensation, difficult to explain, that I'd boarded not a ship but a kind of fantastic, floating black Maria sinking me like a fish, or a stone, farther down through

leagues of darkness, and mercifully to sleep" (21). Waves swung him left then right as a hemlock.

Calhoun's unreliability reflects both of the slave's (and Rutherford will soon assume once again the rule of slave) use of deception as a survival skill and the potential unreliability of some past slave narratives. The reality of the narrative is what extent such truth stretching might matter. The reality and potential truthfulness of the plot does not hinder the mining of the novel. Calhoun is a writer, a creator of fictions, which, of course, possess many truths. Some times the imagined and the actual-infection in life become intertwined, hence, when Squibb overhears Calhoun's interior monologue. We are reminded that a story told or untold is still a story. Johnson's appropriation of Melville's "*Benito Cereno*" character, represented as Allmuseri ship mutineers, speaks not only to the reality of fiction and fiction of reality which is very postmodern concepts indeed, but also to the interconnectedness of slave rebellions (all rebellions, in fact). One fiction, Johnson's mirrors another fiction of Melville, but both tales speak the ways in which the reality of slavery and slave rebellion can be related and retold. Like fiction, like writing and like historiography, the Republic is "in a word.... was from stern to stern, a process" (36).

Calhoun is essentially a writer, transcriber of history, a creator of fiction and writing, of course and perhaps especially for one disemboweled, becomes a source of reacquisition of power, a source of information control. Writing is a means of controlling self, controlling one's history, one's sense of loss. In the novel, references to act of writing begin immediately with the epigraph. Here, the claim made that the book is a journal. The pseudo journal is most certainly an overwritten document, hence a radical revision of a historical document.

Rutherford reassumes ownership of his ability to create and produce. This is also a comment on the role of ownership in slave narratives. Rutherford labels Falcon's log a "rough' log" the one a ship's master edited to produce a more polished book for his employers" (64). Logs are, in part, in fervently lies; there meant to appease overseers, much like the original slave narratives, which were often overseen by abolitionist's interests. But this does not deny the absolute power writing/creating provides for one disenfranchised, like Calhoun. As the novel goes near its conclusion, Rutherford states "only the hours I spent hunched over the skipper's log book kept me steady" (189). Calhoun demonstrates an awareness of the significance of creating fiction out of fact, creating meaning from creativity. The story Rutherford's, and story - that becomes real and meaning full when rendered age word, when others grasp the tale. In the slave narratives, we rarely see such absolute bliss emerging from the primal desire to create. One senses how important it is for Calhoun not just to tell the story, but also to tell a story. (3)

It can raise questions; does Calhoun write reality or fiction? Considering the impossibility of the Allmuseri to What extent is there reality in Calhoun's fiction? The Allmuseri tribe is initially represented as an unrealizable ideal but ultimately emerges as a flawed fantasy. Certainly the most curious oddity of the book, the Allmuseri tribe seems to represent the endemic quality of inter subjectivity, but the ideal, like most ideals, is unrealizable. And although Rutherford claims that "the Allmuseri seemed less a biological tribe than a clan held together by values, a certain vision" (109). One wonders what exactly those values are and how there are carried out. The contradictions that fall upon Americans also fall upon the Allmuseri, a tribe who, in fact, lacks a "unity of being." The tribe experiences multiplicities, as proved by lack of unity of propose lack of an ability to adhere to

supposed idol standards. There are, for example Allmuseri who steal, who kill and who commit suicide - these in spite of the fact that it is said that the tribe disliked property, seldom resorted to violence, and couldn't steal. Even before the encounters with the Americans, there is the power structure in the tribe; there also exists a class system - Diamelo is from a wealthy family while Ngonyama is from a poor family. Steinberg claims that "the tribe is, at least in part, an unrealized construct set up is an ideal and manifested as a failure" (4). The fantastic voyage really mirrors the fantasy of and ideal of the tribe. Cringle describes the Allmuseri as follows:

They are an old people. Older, some say than the Kung tribe of Southern Africa, people who existed when the planet - the galaxy, even was a ball of fire and steam. And not like us at all. No not like you either, though you are black. In all the records there is but one reference about these Allmuseri, and that from a Spanish explorer named Rafael Garcia, whose home is now an institution for the incurably insane in Havane. (43)

For those of us who equate information and documentation with history, the tribe cannot be real. But what exactly it might be represent a metaphor for our fears of differences, otherness. A part of Calhoun's mystical vision is the potential fear and guilt of the slaveholders something more basic, more primitive than our minds and culture? Something more evolved than our intellect and culture? These are questions without answers, for like the original log, the Allmuseri can't be read; they are an unreadable text, as is substantiated by the fact that they have no fingerprints. They have a second brain at the base of their spines; however, this brain would seem to be located in their Asses. But they are not a tribe who is to be

limited by its limited history. Whatever they might be, they represent a possibility a power. They are a tribe of active verbs; “the prediction is granted existence to anything, had over the ages eroded into merely an article of faith for them. Nouns and static substance hardly existed in their vocabulary at all. A ‘bed’ was called a ‘nesting’ a ‘robe’ a ‘warming’” (77). There is no such thing for them; no sense of temporal fluidity for all is an eternal present.

Johnson makes a point not only to describe the ways in which the Allmuseri and the Americans differ, but also to describe how they mirror one another. The Allmuseri “don’t finally represent a truth beyond the flux of the sea. Although the Allmuseri are a synthesis of tribes, they are not only in connections but also by virtue of their existence being defined by a conglomeration of cultures, a dissonance” (Steinberg, 7). We can imagine that the equal number of Allmuseri tribe members and ship members - forty - was not arrived at arbitrarily. Calhoun notes that in the Allmuseri mythology, “Europeans had once been members of their tribe rulers, even, for a time-but fell into what was for these people the blackest of sins. The failure to experience the unity of being everywhere was the Allmuseri vision of hell... that was where we were taking them - into the madness of multiplicity” (65). The tribe emerges as a fantasy of wholeness or perhaps a representation of the guilt of slave masters a guilt that snacks of self-down loathing, for as Johnson has noted in interviews, everyone is intimately connected not too far down the genetic line. Difference is essentially external, not meaningful; it assumes meaning because there are those who assume that difference exists. The fantasy of wholeness is also interestingly a white fantasy of the behavior of black slaves. Calhoun claims that “eating no meat, {the Allmuseri} were easy to feed disliking property, they were simple to clothe and able to hell themselves, they

required no medication. They seldom fought. They could not steal. They fell sick it was said if they wronged anyone (78). Little sickness and fighting, little desire for material, easy to feed and clothe have shown the perfect slaves for a master.

The Allmuseri and European connection researches its conclusion by the novel's end, where we see that the cultures have already been corrupted, after learning that Papa deals in slaves European, "What was the name you used Calhoun? Allmuseri? My grand daddy used to call himself that ...my people on my grandpa's side is from that tribe" (201). Papa will provide for the three remaining Allmuseri tribe members, and Calhoun recognizes an intimate interconnectedness- Santos might be related to Baleka, the girl he has adopted.

As mysterious and suspicious as the Allmuseri tribe and its history are, the clan's got truly stand as a narrative ambiguity. Once again, when considering god, we are forced to consider Calhoun's reliability; the very existence of the god becomes questionable. It emerges as a manifestation of contradictions-it is chained, limited in its knowledge of mathematics. The notion of capturing a god seems to bring into doubt this god's existence. The god is presented both as a recognizable Western deity (complete with its mysteries) and as something wholly non-Western- something tangible, visible, incomplete, and not all-powerful. For Squibb, the Allmuseri god is the missing link, for Cringle it is an extinct lizard, while meadows has heard that it fell from the sky "And poor Tommy O' Toole, after being lowered to the god, comes back up "with only half his mind-or could it be it was twice the mind he had before" (68). Seeing the god provides no clarity and seems to only lead to confusion. The very idea of capturing a god might seem to speak loudly of white American imperialism; it stands as an attempt to capture

that which is beyond reach, an attempt to achieve illogical control divine supremacy.

Yet Falcon perceives the entity as something quite distinct from our notion of a deity. For Falcon, this creature is “a witty conversationalist ... that can’t understand any of the sciences based on matter, like geometry ... it can’t do geometry, you see, ‘cause it’s god ... [It has] limitation ... I daresay it has downright contradictions” (101). An illogical god by most Western standards, the Allmuseri creature possesses human quality of limitation and contradictions. Late in the novel, Calhoun finally has his own encounter with the god, who had chosen to present itself to me in the form of the one man with whom I had bloody, unfinished business: the runaway slave from Reverent (handler’s farm-my father, the fugitive Riley Calhoun (167). This is Calhoun’s version of his very own trinity -god as father and as spirit. This god or whatever it might be is, of course individualized for that sees it. As Calhoun’s father, the god represents which is elusive, that which causes psychic damage. Which Rutherford loves and hates. Calhoun needs to confront his past via a god is or not and this creature allows him to do so.

Manifested in the appearance of the god is a common motif in Johnson’s novel that mask wearing and playing role. Assuming roles and shifting identities would seem integral in Johnson’s conception of inter subjectivity and his decidedly Buddhist outlook. In an interview, Johnson claims, “I don’t believe in the existence of the ego. I think it’s a theoretical construct ... [I]f there is such a thing as identity I don’t think that its fixed or static, it’s a process.” (Little, 161) Reminiscent of the Allmuseri language, in the same interview Johnson states, “The self is one of those objects we talk about without having fully examined. For

me, if there's anyway to talk about it, it's as a verb and not as a noun" (161-62). The assumption of other identities is perhaps reminiscent of slave narratives, where in the narrator, by necessity, takes on other roles amidst his or her escape or narrator might steal his or her way out of slavery by stealing another's identity (as Jacobs does, for examples). Perhaps Calhoun's stealing of Squibb's papers is trying to be free that which he is not, is a comment on a kind of passing. Calhoun's identities is also for the time of stolen creates. Meadows wears Calhoun's clothes, speaks in a black, southern Illinois dialect. Commenting on the idea of blurred subjectivity, of no real identity (or freedom to express it) for slaves, Meadows soon after assumes an Allmuseri identity, as he speaks the tribes' languages. Calhoun himself is an inter subjective moment, sees himself as an Allmusri; "there was a difference in them. They were leagues from whom-indeed, without a home-and in Ngonyama's eyes saw displacement, an emptiness like may be all his brethren as he once knew them were dead. To wit I saw myself" (124). Calhoun here sees himself as potentially (re) enslaved; earlier he had confused his identity with Jackson's, of whom he says "I was his shadow - self "(115). By the end, Calhoun can make a little more sense of the interconnectedness of human behavior and activity. He claims:" I was a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time" (162-63).

One of the most important aspects is the role that Calhoun certainly and ironically assumes, is of slave narration. A free man, Calhoun's thrust in the position of resuming a sort of servitude. Of course, Johnson's narrative differs greatly from its slave narrative predecessors. While Calhoun's involvement in a ship mutiny would seem to connect his activities to those of a slave narration, he claims "all bonds, landsides or on ship, between Masters and Mates, women and

men ... were a lie forged briefly in the name of conveniences and just as quickly broken when they no longer served one's interests" (92). Certainly the confusion of the voyage mimics is the confusion of being stolen from one's homeland or even of living as slaves, where the slave must surely have witnessed mysterious figures, rampant violence, odd figurehead, and a confusion of roles. While Calhoun becomes private investigator to the mutiny, he no longer technically a slave, cannot fully bind with the mutineers "Yes I was black, as they were," he claims, "but they had a common bond I could but marvel at" (132). The novel most resembles a slave narrative or historical slave mutiny in its depiction of the Allmuseri take over of the Republic. Once the mutineers take control of the ship, it is decided that the "master's house must be dismantled. Only Allmuseri was to be spoken by the crew when in contact with the newly empowered bondmen" (154). Diamelo's command oddly and anachronistically seems the reminiscent of the Black nationalistic movement, signals an attempt to dismantle the master's tools, more precisely the tool of language that which the slave narrator could not dismantle for he or she had to persuade in common ground. There is something strangely refreshing in Calhoun's awareness of the Allmuseri fight for freedom. His father did not fight, rather he fought his fantasy and others in the fields, chafing under the bondage and every other constraint as well: " marriage and religion, as White men imposed these on Africans" (170). Calhoun is able to live rebellion vicariously though the Allmuseri.

Johnson frequently takes references of the slave/master relationship. Calhoun reminds us that freedom is a conflicted, complex notion. He is a freeman, he constantly finds himself playing the role of a slave yet. Like Toni Morrison, Johnson suggests that notion of enslavement and subjugation does not cease once a

man is declared free. In fact, there is an essential irony in declaration of freedom; when one frees him or her from a system (such as slavery); one is still defined by that system. The slave narratives frequently did not address what certainly many runaways must have pondered while slaves becomes free themselves; they were forced into position in which freedom had to be obtained or secured. It was not an unalienable right of their humanity.

Calhoun's early relationship with Falcon is placed in a similar position as many other slaves, especially female slaves -under constant subjugation and sexual threat of the owner. Falcon's most uncertain achievement concerns the ways in which he has essentially altered the Allmuseri tribe. As their surrogate master, he ruined what they ideally and actually represented - a fantastic tribe, but also a typical tribe of people stolen from their homeland. In a sense, Calhoun claims,

we all were ringed to the skipper in cruel wedlock. Centuries would pass whilst the Allmuseri lived through the consequences of what had set in motion; he would be with them, I suspected, for Eons, like an ex-lover, a despised husband, a rapist who, though destroyed by a mob, still comes to you nightly in dreams: a creature hated yet nevertheless at the heart of all they thought did (144).

This is the power that all slaveholders possess.

One of the ways in which Johnson most radically revises the preconceived perception of the traditional slave narrative is to question any singular notion of what being enslaved might mean. The story begins with Calhoun playing the role of the free man being enslaved after being set free. While the novel ends with

Calhoun's freedom, we witness, perhaps more than we've seen in the slave narratives, the psychic consequences of slavery. In the novel, the slave narrative appears to begin when, at the end of chapter one, and perhaps in a dream, or dream-like state (Can we ever truly say that the whole episode is not a dream or a nightmare?), Calhoun remembers his initial service. We are loudly reminded here that a freed man can never escape slavery. The very act of forced servitude is so profound -so incapable of being transcended - that the free Rutherford Calhoun enters a state of slavery by his own free will.

Johnson focuses on slavery as being more of a transcendent psychological notion than a particular historical moment. Instead of specifying the subject, he universalizes the concept such as, reminds us of the possibilities of many forms of continued physical, psychological, and cultural enslavement. According to Rushdy, "during the course of the *Middle Passage*, Rutherford discovers several things. First, he learns that a culture cannot be possessed because it is an unstable entity. He also learns, though, that bonds and connections are a matter of surrendering to another order of being, and are not simply determined by racial or biological destiny" ("The phenomenology," 377). Certainly, the anachronism in the novel points to this Calhoun is forced into necessity. He enters into position of slave master's (Falcon's) right-hand man, a position of informational servitude. Calhoun and Falcon engage in a pervert, absurd relationship that almost resembles a surrogate family. This reminds the reader of Calhoun's brother's relationship with his master, a relationship that no matter how perverse, probably was common. Jackson thought it possible to serve his people by humbly being there when they needed him -

whites too, if they weren't too evil, and he was incapable of locking anything out of his heart. There can be no other way to un riddle why my brother, more than any other bondman, was generally faithful to Reverend Chandler, laying out his clothes each morning, combing his dry, brittle hair, fetching his nightly footbath, and just as regular in the performance of his appointed tasks for the other servants, standing there by everyone's side through family death and sickness. (133)

Rutherford and Jackson were to inherit that entire master Peleg Chandler had; they were perhaps ironically to profit from slavery. Chandler is described as being reluctant slaveholders "who hated the peculiar institution, hated slavery" (111,8). Johnson here investigates the possibility of the reluctant slaveholder who inherited the institution failed to condemn it yet. However, this failure does not mean the reality hasn't impacted the parties involved. Johnson describes to a kind of spider web theory of humanity toying with one-thread that affects the whole pattern; each human act of cruelty affects all of humanity (indeed a very Buddhist idea.). Calhoun recognized this in the Allmuseri. He claims,

"Stupidly, I had seen their lives and culture as timeless product, as a finished thing, pure essence or permanent meaning envied and wanted to embrace, when the truth was that they were process and Heraclitean change, like any men, not fixed but evolving and as vulnerable to metamorphosis as the body of the boy we'd thrown overboard. Ngonyama and may be all the Africans, I realized, were not wholly Allmuseri anymore." (124)

Identity is never fixed. A free slave's freedom is never fixed. A free slave's freedom is tempered by his or her experiential reality and freedom, like slavery is a tenuous notion, if not physically, at least psychologically.

History is tenuous notion too, perhaps especially for those historically disenfranchised. Johnson, like several other contemporary African American writers - Morrison, Octavia Butler, Sherley Anne Williams Anne Williams, Ishmael Reed - explicitly or implicitly attempts to inscribe some form of historical retelling; these writers do so, of course primarily to reveal, not to conceal, truth about nineteenth century America. But inscribing possibility, and not recorded "fact," is questionable business to some who might accept written document as doctrine regardless, these writers do not create history; they re-create historical possibility, plausible scenarios omitted from historical documentation. Johnson demonstrates how such revision can be liberating.

Calhoun is a liar by nature who lies to Baleka concerning the well being of the ship after the mutiny. He claims "the 'useful fiction' of this lie got the injured through the night and gave the children reason not to hurl themselves overboard before the first blush of whiskers had a chance to appear on their cheeks" (162). How does Calhoun utilize this modern notion of "useful fiction"? Does he refer to his story, the novel, and other slave narratives? Recreating history is perhaps a useful fiction necessary to preserve some perception of life and culture. Calhoun's own narrative is an act of revising and rewriting history. The Captain's log surely is not the log Calhoun writes it; rather, he writes over or rewrites the historical document -an overwriting of the master's inscription. When papa Z asks Rutherford what he is writing in the log, Calhoun duplicitously answer, "oh, dates ... nothing important, just the ship's manifest, with for each Allmuseri slave on

board, payment rates for the ship's principal inventory, including y our whack, papa" (200). Another glorious lie seems necessary for fiction. Johnson here really calls into question the nature of historiography, the process of collecting and assessing historical data. While what Calhoun offers may not be truth, the Captain's version of history too may not be truth. All documentation might be biased and inherently unreliable. A postmodernist like Johnson probably would not be comfortable simply overwriting an unsubstantiated or incomplete truth with perceived truth. His sweep is broader, and he questions the very notion of data collection, historical analysis, and truth itself.

Johnson's reconsideration of slave narratives and his focus on slavery seems as a matter that transcends physical subjugation in no way diminishes his comments on the effects of the institution. A central theme in slave narratives is implied understanding on the part of the narrator that he or she is free; the narrators were free, but they were certainly physically damaged, and freedom on these terms is relative. Self-definition and awareness of senses of subjectivity once turns free. It must surely have been remained a more complex notion than some of the narrative might have led us to believe. Calhoun comments on this whenever he ponders the nature of his role as son and his absent father. Essentially fatherless, Calhoun defines his identity by his dad's absence. He says that he has searched the faces of black men on Illinois farms and streets for fifteen years, hoping to identify this man named Riley Calhoun,

primarily to give him a piece of mind, followed by the drubbing him so richly deserved for selfishly enjoying his individual liberty after our mother, Ruby died, thus living me in the care of a brother like a negative of myself. He was (to me) he possible - me that

lived my life's alternate options, that me I fled. Me. Yet not me.

Me if I gave in. (112)

Johnson explores the potential of slavery in great detail in this presentation of the Allmuseri. Though the reader is uncertain whether the tribe's mythology holds any truth, we see apparent changes in the tribe's makeup, its communal philosophy, once its members have been enslaved. The tribe "was not the world of multiplicity, of me versus thee" (140). The idea of people is chattel changes the whole perception of commerce and ownership. The European desire to possess the Allmuseri leads to the Allmuseri desire to possess The European. Perversely, a notion of human ownership becomes cyclical. After the mutiny, Calhoun notes that "suddenly the ship felt insubstantial: a pawn in a large game of property so vast it trivialized our own struggles on board" (150). After the takeover, Diamelo doesn't allow the crew to sing in English; "they had to nurture the Allmuseri god, use Allmuseri medicine, not touch their women (even their eyes when women passed), dine on Allmuseri dishes (155). That is the wonderfully ironic. We witnessed a kind of cultural enslavement; we see the ideal Allmuseri not respect another culture-perhaps another kind of slavery. The tribe has been defiled, for its members have harbored feelings of ill will, even murder. And Calhoun, who very much needed to possess (by stealing), has been changed for better. "The voyage," he notes, "had irreversibly changed my seeing, made of me a cultural mongrel, and transformed the world into a fleeting shadow play I felt no need to possess or dominate, only appreciate in the ever extended present" (187). He has lost his desire to control because he has seen, as a result of experiences with the Allmuseri, purity turned imperial.

After all of this rewritten history and exploration into slave and master relationships and the short and long term effects of slaved and slaver ideology, who knew that Johnson's *Middle Passage* would turn into a love story, aromatic once at that? As Steinberg claims, 'While Johnson might fashion the novel as an investigation of the possibilities of inter subjective unity, he fails to present a universe in which this has been attained, although a secularized form of individual connection, i.e., between Rutherford and Isadora, is achieved' (5-6). By defining and presenting Africans and Americans similarly, Johnson suggests that there already exist inter subjective relationships, yet by creating vast contradiction within each culture, he points the impossibility of such relationships. The possibility of triumphant connection defined between two people. Perhaps, as love or intercourse, ultimately emerged in the novel. Upon return from his violent journey; Calhoun shows little interest in preserving the integrity of cosmos. He only desires Isadora. Calhoun finally does not seek philosophical comfort and fulfillment; he searches for personal unity, as represented by his search for his father. In an odd way, father/son union is achieved once Calhoun assumes the role of his brother's surrogate rather (ironically, perhaps, for by the end Calhoun cannot actually become a father, at least temporarily, as he is unable to have intercourse with Isadora). He ultimately assumes the role of Baleka's father.

Calhoun learns his postmodern quest is not without meaning. In fact; it is quite traditional. Johnson uses slavery and the slave narrative as his setting for examining the transformations of love. Just as Rutherford learns that theft is of limited use in dismantling the power of the propertied class during the course of the middle passage, so he learns during the same journey, According to Rushdy Calhoun describes love as "love is not always a danger; nor is it something he can

willfully avoid" ("The Properties of Desire," 91). Calhoun's desire for Isadora beings at the orgasmic moment at sea when he falls unconscious from illness: "the I fainted/Or died/ whatever" (171). Ironically, Calhoun is unable to have sex with Isadora once the sea journey ends. He also realized that he is probably sterile. Calhoun defines his inability as a desire for something other than intercourse, the embrace of, says, a father or mother and son.

Calhoun observes his inability to make love to Isadora, his memories of the *Middle Passage* kept coming back, reducing the velocity of his desire and its violence, and in place of his longing for feverish love. That is making left only a vaster stillness that felt remarkably full. Calhoun describes his inability as: "a feeling that, just now, I wanted our futures blended, not our limbs, our histories perfectly twined for all time, not our flesh" (208). Because of this experience, Calhoun now seeks a different kind of connection. He sees history differently, as a continuum, a process, and not numerous transcendent moments. At novel's end, "Isadora drifted toward rest, nestled snugly beside me, where she would remain all night while we forgetful of ourselves, gently crossed the Flood and countless seas of suffering" (209). This awareness of all human suffering (again, quite Buddhist) is recognition not of one salve's fight but of the fights of all oppressed and all suffering.

Ultimately, Johnson's postmodern retelling of the slave narrative offers the reader a lesson in historical possibility, but in doing so he reminds us that his re-inscription is both fictional and, to a certain extent plausible. Though history itself might be a fiction, Johnson never loses sight of the pleasure of such fictionalization. For Johnson, creating historical possibility is significant on several levels; historical omissions are brought to light and the act of doing so is one of

creativity. The slave narrators knew that words are powerful and empowering; but rarely we see such absolute pleasure in the power to control and manipulate language. In all of the traditional slave narratives, and the contemporary revisions of the narratives (such as Morrison's *Beloved*, Williams's *Dessa Rose*, Reed's *Flight to Canada*), we ultimately confront the power of language to inscribe, revise, and question history.

In this way, the final chapter is related to the narrator's discovery about the culture, system and behavior of black people. Blacks are taken an object because of whites' based ideology. Calhoun's journey is one that all black must take in order to find themselves and their deeper meaning. Calhoun himself proves that his fiction narrates about the history of black, is based on the historical accuracy that is true.

Chapter-IV

Conclusion: The Possibility of Black Discourse

Through the study of *Middle Passage* in chapter III, We come to know that Johnson's *Middle Passage* creates one of the classical slave narratives of English literature. Johnson reminds us of historical operation upon the African American reality.

Middle Passage is the study of the slave narration and as such the novel has deliberately been made the historical operation, which is drawn from the real image of nineteenth century. This is Johnson's political idea that concerns about slavery, freedom and contemporary status of African people. Johnson recollects the subject matter from the traditional slave narrative.

Calhoun is a writer. As a creator of fictions he narrates the events through monologue, which possess many truths. Calhoun has shown reality or fiction, is a question raises here about the monologue of Calhoun. He has presented Allmuseri tribe that is initially represented as an unrealizable idea. One of the most important aspects of the book, the Allmuseri tribe seems to represent the endemic quality of inter subjective. A problematic situation here in the novel seems Allmuseri, and that in fact, lacks a unity of being.

Johnson's tale about sea travel, human nature and self-discovery is a riveting and thrilling drama. This detailed, historically precise and phase of the trans-atlantics slave trade and on the adventures of an ex-slave, in an advertent and unwilling participant in the enslaving of his African brothers and sisters. The year

is 1830; the protagonist of the novel, Rutherford Calhoun, recently freed slave is in the voyage, who recollects the slave narratives.

It has been presented Allmuseri tribe from the positive way. They did not like property. They were so simple to wear cloth. They could not steal and involve fighting. They could so sick if they wronged anyone. There all characteristic of Allmuseri have clearly proved that they were the perfect slaves for the master. The reality and culture of Allmuseri have already been abducted.

Johnson often uses the references of master slave relationship. It reminds the truth that freedom is a conflicted notion. Though Calhoun is a freeman, he constantly gets him playing the role of a slave. Johnson here advises us that notion of enslavement may not stop if a man is declare free. When one is free him or her from a system of slavery; he or she may still define from that system.

The novel opens with Calhoun playing the role of the freeman being enslaved after being set free. When the novel ends with Calhoun's freedom, we have seen the psychic consequences of slavery. Calhoun's role seems here that a freeman can never escape from the slavery. The very act of forced is too profound that the free Rutherford Calhoun enters a state of slavery by his own free will. Though there is catastrophic situation in the journey of sea, Calhoun is ready to struggle against the disaster. He wants to establish his existence, struggling with the problems.

Johnson focuses on slavery and psychological notion rather than on a particular historical moment. He does not specially focus on the subject but universalizes the concept that reminds us of the possibilities of many forms of continued physic, psychological and cultural enslavement. During the course of the

middle passage, Rutherford Calhoun discovers several things about cultures and dignity and they are determined by racial destiny. Ngonyama realized that there is no fixity in identity, freedom and reality, psychologically. Like Johnson, other several contemporary African American writers have used the historical retelling but they were only creating the historical possibility. On the contrary, Johnson primarily focuses on the recorded facts. He attempts to also that such revision can be liberating.

Recreating history is perhaps a useful fiction necessary to preserve some perception of life and culture. Here in the novel, Calhoun's narration is an act of revising the history. He rewrites the historical documents and hides the reality of log. Papa Z asks Rutherford what he is writing. But his answer is nothing more than the dates, just ship's manifest, about the Allmuseri slave on board and payment rates for the ship's principal inventory. So it is the process, Johnson really calls here the nature of historiography, which is the collection of historical data.

Johnson here tries to show what Calhoun is writing may not be true in postmodern era similarly what Falcon is writing may not be true but the recorded history from the data collection, historical analysis and truth are very far from the creative history. Johnson's focus on slavery and reconsideration of slave narrative, show the physical subjugation. The slave narrative is implied understanding on the part that the narrator is free but physically he is damaged. Since he has a sense of subjectivity, he will free be once. Johnson investigates the potential of slavery great detail in this presentation of the Allmuseri.

We witness a kind of cultural enslavement, Allmuseri do not respect another culture and another slavery. Calhoun also realizes at the ending part of the novel that he has changed his seeing; made him cultural mongrel and felt no need

to possess or dominate after the voyage. He has lost to control because he has gained experiences with the Allmuseri. He rewrites the log from the knowledge of gained experiences. We have known the effect of Slaved and Slaver ideology from the rewritten history and exploration into slave and master relationship.

Calhoun's postmodern quest is meaningful, based on the tradition.

Rutherford Calhoun learns that the activities of theft have limited use in dismantling the power of the propertied class during the course of middle passage; so, he compares his love as a typical subject matter not a dangerous thing.

Calhoun makes us clear that his inability to make love with Isadora is his memory of *Middle Passage* coming back, which is reducing the velocity of his desire, violence and feelings. He is interested to knit the future relationship with Isadora not the flesh but their perfect historical twined for all the time because Calhoun realizes while Isadora drifted rest. She would remain all night while they forget themselves. He gently crossed the flood and countless sea of suffering. This awareness of all human suffering is recognition not of one slave's fight but the fight of all oppressed and suffering people. They have deep understanding. They are co-operating indirectly and we get this from the denouement of this novel.

Johnson has clearly mentioned that the postmodern retelling of the slave narrative, has not only shown the historical possibilities as the other contemporary African American writers have done, but also his fictional re- inscription is to a certain extent. Though history itself might be a fiction, Johnson does not lose the sight of the pleasure of such fictionalization. For Johnson, it is most important and significant to create historical possibility on several levels- historical omissions are brought to light and act of doing so is one of creativity. So Johnson has used the real subject matter through the experiences of Rutherford Calhoun who narrates the

whole events from his experience. Rutherford Calhoun narrates the event fictionalizing the slave narrative, which is true; as well to admit that the historical background is the backbone of fiction.

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