

I.

BLACK BOY appears to be a very impersonal title for an autobiography, yet it is the biography of a ~~xx~~ highly individualistic writer. Its impersonal appearance is in reality the personality of a ~~single~~ people. The quotation which follows the title prepares way for a tragedy of the Negro people caught in the white malevolence of the South for their life-time. It reads:

[50]

DARKNESS AT NOON is the ~~xxxx~~ theme also of an entirely different play set in Russia. The similarity is more than title-deep. The universality of the problem of our day, the problem of the individual vs. totalitarianism, is the pivotal point in the one and in the other, and in part 2 of Black Boy we will see that a more direct connection exists between a Negro in the white South and the total hold that the Russian C.P. has over American Communists.

II.

Wright's writings as a whole, as well as in this book, represent logical stages in the development of the problem--the search of freedom for the Negro people:

- (1) BLACK BOY begins with what Wright terms "the four-year old days of my life", that is at the age of 4 when as a boy in Natchez, Miss., he accidentally sets fire to his shack-home, gets nearly beaten to death by his mother, is constantly haunted by hunger on the one hand, and what he calls "white death," that is lynching on the other.

- (2) Here we have: (a) family relationship--Mother-Father-son
(b) social relationship--with others, "white" with one another;
(c) hunger--which is the physical apprehension OF SOCIETY

- (3) Let's take up the last item first--HUNGER [P 13]

The lyricism does not dull the pangs of hunger any more than the age span dulls the sense of the experience of the South

[P 20]

At the end we have Wright feeling a greater stranger not only to his father but to his whole race

III.

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This then is the whole problem. He has been criticized by the Negroes for criticizing Negroes so ruthlessly. But his criticism is not only of Negroes. It is also of whites, not only as they mistreat the Negroes in the South, but in their own empty lives as we see him talk of the waitresses. He says, first, that for them to understand the Negroes a revolution must occur in their own lives which would include the suffering of the Negroes; and secondly in the superficiality of their own lives. In fact his expression "how void of great hopes" is not limited to Negroes or whites, Americans or Russians. It has been caught by the French intellectuals and called EXISTENTIALISM and is expressive of the psychological disintegration of the world today. We will return to that later.

Now let us trace some of these stages of development which Wright rejects--first, simple flight, whether it is him under the shack, him escaping the South or the experience of others "BIA BOY LEAVES HOME".

- 2) In contrast to that, and the highly individualized loneliness, Wright feels an overwhelming need for association and integration. He wants a new world that not only fully realizes man's personality but the whole potential which could make them entirely new men. (His greatest defeat in fact is when the illusion that he has found it in the American CP shatters.* And this total response and total need begins early in life, and we find that the first time he experiences it is when told story in Jackson, Miss. by boarder of "Bluebeard and his Seven Wives".

- 3) But here too he finds defeat: a) Uncle Hoskin's death
b) relation to Hew
c) War and RACIAL CONFLICT

P 645
everywhere
He can't simply have a whole world
white society never lets him be

IV.

In contrast to this there is the association with balck boys: 1) No premeditation yet (2) hostility to white is gauge of friendship, and not schooling.

Furthermore, he finds both in religious atmosphere --7th Day Adventists & School--strangeness
white FIRST WRITING
and FIRST FULL STORY "THE VOODOO OF HELL'S HALF ACRE"
The end is he feels ****

V.
"A NON*MAN"--1) getting and losing jobs--"I never felt humble"
2) is foolish to think he can learn a trade
3) right with Negro boy for \$5
4) theatre job and stealing to get nothh
5) Irish Catholic and lending books from libraries
6) Shut out from Negro life too

A CONTINUOUSLY CONTAINES DREAM OF TERROR, TENSION & ANXIETY
Yet he says "This was the culture from which I sprang; this the terror from which I fled!!
yet I could not leave the South"

PART ***b***
CHICAGO--1) post office job
2) first cynicism
3) words--Stein's 3 lives (P30)
4) Garveyites and their passionate rejection of America"
NEW STAGEp 1929 CRASH
1) Relief station (P24)
2) JOHN REEB CLUBS

BREAK WITH CP : a) Moscow trials--Return to Barkness at Noon pp.114-15
b) May Day demonstration and end

Now I wish to return to EXISTENTIALISM, and WRIGHT;
1) Whereas alike in "circle of utter loneliness"
they cannot be the same:

EXISTENTIALISM--rejection of bourgeois world,
 rejection of Communist world.
 desire for deep feeling only to be made
 impotent by PARALYZING INDIFFERENCE

Sartre defines anguish as "concurrence of the complete
 absence of justification and
 responsibility towards others".

Wright attracted to their "underground lives" but being a
 Negro he cannot lose himself
 IN BLAMING THE INDIVIDUAL FOR THE PROBLEMS OF SOCIETY
 NOR CAN HE POSE AN INDIVIDUAL SOLUTION.

His anguish is deeper than that of existentialists. He does
 not complain however that he is one isolated individual
 but because he & other Negroes are
 surrounded by white hostility.

He fails to find the answer for Negro freedom

Problem of Democratic rights & civil liberties, but in
 reality show exclusion of Negro people from full participation
 in American society has created

problems for the individual personality which are identical
 with those described by those who for over a century

have been a barometer of European culture--the Fr. intellectual
 IN THEIR WORK IS THE PROOF OF HOW UNIVERSAL IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
 DISINTEGRATION OF OUR WORLD TODAY

What Next?

Wright's writings represent logical stages
 in the development of a problem--the search
 for freedom for Negro people.

- 1) Particular stages which he rejects--
 - a) #Big Boy leaves Home
 - b) Simple flight/
 - c) complete subservience
 - d) withdrawal & hard work
- 2) Chooses CP or complete overhauling of present society--
 but conflict there appears
- 3) Existentialists explain Wright & Wright the existentialists
 both as intellectuals try to find a community of
 life but cannot find it because they do not see
 social labor
- 4) His art needs stimulus of social conception adequate to
 his passion for N. freedom & for universality in modern individ.

His art
 needs a social
 stimulus