

**VIOLENCE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF RICHARD WRIGHT'S THE
MAN WHO KILLED A SHADOW AND
JAMES BALDWIN'S THE FIRE NEXT TIME**

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: VIOLENCE IN FICTION

Violence is universal phenomenon social scientists explore in their various works in order to portray the causes of conflict and these conflicts are amicably resolved. Violence is expressed when there is a conflict between a person and the existing system which he belongs. However as Anifowose rightly points out:

Violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power and by groups in the process of losing power. Violence has been pursued in the defence of order by the privilege, in the name of justice by the oppressed and in fear displacement by the threatened (Anifowose,1).

Similarly in literary circle, violence occurs when writers attempt to use their literary works, ethos or canon to express the need for a change in the socio-political system they found themselves. Violence is also perpetrated in art when writers use their works to expose various levels of economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and problem of identity among other social and political vices.

My intention in this essay is to attempt a comparative analysis of constitutive elements which extrapolate violence in fiction. Attempt shall be illuminated in examining the models used by writers to channel violence in their attempt to sanitise the ills of society. I shall attempt to examine these literary features and model them to the selected fiction of Wright and Baldwin with passing references to works of other Black writers in America.

In doing this, there is close reference to both the analysis of literary texts and critical works. This is a narratological tool which lends axiomatic credence to close reading and critical analysis. This subsumes to Jonathan Crowe's notion of literary analysis, Crowe asserts that:

Literature is an important carrier and constructor of cultural memory, it is a cultural phenomena that intersects with history It is strategic because it helps humans make sense of their world, narratives (whether literary, visual or oral form).This is an important resource for restructuring and recomprehending experience.

(Acts of Memory, 1999).

Both Wright and Baldwin have used their works within the narratological praxis to reconstruct the historical instinct of the American society with a concern for human development across political and social narratives. They attempt to use their works to ascertain a change in the obnoxious system by revising “memory and history”. However this memory and history constitutes a great concern for scholars: Pierre Norra in Les Lieux de Memoire,(1984) opines that “memory and history are fundamental literary elements in the understanding of the ethos of the people, it opens the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconsciousness of its successive deformations in art. It also helps in the architectonic reconstruction of the narrative drive in fiction”

For Bureaux, D (1981) Moors. A (1995) and Fabian J (1983, 1996) memory and history gives a clear narratological image to fiction. It enables the critic to understand the social, economic and political background in the analysis of societal trends which constitutes the integral nature of art. Similarly, Wright and Baldwin are products of history and memory because their works explains not only the plight of the proletariat black masses but the plight of both the whites and blacks in America.

They use narrative heroism, ironic vision, character symbolism, language configuration among other constitutive elements of violence to explain the forces of violence in the spate of the African American experience.

NARRATIVE HEROISM IN WRIGHT AND BALDWIN

Heroism in narrative fiction informs violence when the protagonist decides to achieve his aspirations by any means. Writers throughout the literary ages have created one hero or the other to revolt against the existing structure. According to Charles Nnolim, “The Greek Ideal of hero was a man who owned it all to himself, his gods and his nation, the development of his talent to the highest possible limits. He is individualistic in his pursuit of honour- either in military glory through great feasts of valour performed in battle or in altruistic hero who puts the good of the state before his own welfare”(Approaches,190).

The hero in a work of art develops fiction by doing everything possible when he concerns himself with issues such as violence, love, hatred, risks in art. This situation evokes sensitive message in the minds of the reader

or the audience who is desperate to see the end of such hero. That is why C.M Bowra stresses the deeds of a hero and what makes him heroic. He posits that “a hero differs from other men in his degree of his powers. In most heroic poetry these are specifically human, even though they are carried beyond the ordinary limitations of humanity. Even when the hero has supernatural powers and is all the more formidable because of them, they do little more than supplement his essentially human gifts. He awakens admiration primarily because he has a rich abundant qualities which other men have to a much less extent... he is admired because he satisfies new standards which set a high value on anyone who surpasses other men in qualities which all passes to some degrees”(quoted from Maduka’s Intellectuals,8).

African American writers like Wright, Baldwin, Ellison etc create heroes and heroines to fight against the existing socio-political situation. They attempt to show their reactions against the economic situation by suggesting various ways through which their actions can effect change. That is why Ralph Ellison’s hero in Invisible Man is happy to have discovered his invisibility. As a black man, the white ghosts haunt him around, but now that he is invisible he could see the realities of life.

The hero is fighting a war without allowing his enemies to know that war is in progress. One night the hero accidentally accosts a blonde who sees him “because of the darkness” The blonde calls him an insulting name and he demands for an apology. The white man refuses but continues using more insulting words. The blonde is “mugged” to death by the invisible man who exerts his invisibility in other areas to buttress his heroic deeds. The discovery of his invisibility gives him an advantage over others.

Wright uses the narrative heroism in a different device to exemplify violence in explaining the state of events of the African Americans which constantly lead to conflict, violence and breakdown. He creates a hero who is independent and resourceful For Baldwin, heroic deeds are reflectional of his autobiographical extrapolations. While Wright’s heroes are radical, forward and dangerous, Baldwin’s heroes are dynamic, considerate, but they escape events at all times. The heroes in Native Son and The Man Who Killed a Shadow of Richard Wright are good examples.

In The Man Who Killed A Shadow, Wright creates Saul Saunders as the hero. He is constantly enveloped by the situation of the system. Although, with his low education, he got employment in white establishment at

different times as gardener, chauffer and finally as a cleaner in the white dominated cathedral. His meeting Eva Houseman a depressed white lady who uses the library demonstrates his resistance and heroism against discrimination and dominance because he tries to eliminate the one million psychological miles that existed between the black and white man.

Eva Houseman constantly sits all day reading at the cathedral without talking to Saul Saunders who cleans the shelves, lockers, tables, chairs and the books. At different occasions their eyes met but Saul removes his eyes because he does not want to involve himself in any form of trouble with this woman whose grey eyes are seductive and dangerous at the same time. At the close of the work he leaves the Cathedral while the janitor come around to close shut the doors.

Saul Saunders was perplexed when Eva Houseman broke the silence by calling him to come and clean the under of her chair. Legs sprawl apart, eyes deep blue and she repeatedly points her fingers under her pants. “come nigger” her tin but deadly voice reverberates the silence in the cathedral hall, “you have not cleaned here” pointing under her pants. Her countenance changed as she desires Saul to come over and complete his “cleaning jobs”. Rather the heroic Saul feels intimidated and humiliated. He advanced to Eva and launched a slap on her. Eva yells and he moves to stop the shouting because “hearing a woman yells is as good as hearing your death sentence in the court of law”. Saul who is drunk that morning looks for a hard plank to stop this smouldering woman from crying because this continuous yelling is driving hard at his pines. Having used this plank continuously on her head, it seems that she is now quiet. At least the police on patrol would not come and arrest him since she is no longer shouting.

Saul seems not to have known that he has killed a shadow that haunts his life because he did not run away or rape her or disappear into the thin air. He only relocates to the drinking spot to continue to enjoy himself. Not until some minutes before it becomes dawn on him that the woman is dead. He gets the confirmation when the charge on manslaughter is read for him in the court.

With a narrative device, Richard Wright tells the story of Saul and the intention to set himself free. Saul’s heroic deeds are further manifested when he kills the shadow without knowing that he has committed murder. He has the effrontery to wait for judgement in the hands of fellow shadows he has been avoiding all these years!

James Baldwin's heroes are dramatic, cunning, non aggressive but fundamental in exposing violence in the African American experience. According to Chickenbones Journal of African America:

James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963) sometimes referred to as his "eloquent manifesto", which he hoped would avert racial conflagration, appeared first in *The New Yorker* (1962), a journal which Ishmael Reed described as the "epitome of uptown pretensions and snobbery," as "Letter from a Region in my Mind." Though Baldwin received some heat for his choice of publication, his massive essay caused an immediate sensation and was quickly published in book form. Some believe Baldwin's book spurred and help to "galvanize" the civil rights movement which resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Fire Next Time opens with a six to seven page dedicatory letter to his nephew and namesake James, entitled in short "On the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation." Baldwin advises his nephew on how to deal with the racist world in which he was born. In spite the horrors of America, Baldwin believed the Negro must take the high road and show whites, in their ignorance and innocence, how to live the good life, how to love

This journal further explains that:

The section comprising the dedicatory letter Baldwin entitled "My Dungeon Shook," which we see from the above quote were words of some unknown bard, a former Negro slave, who spoke to the glorious spiritual phenomena of emancipation.

The section comprising the "Letter from a Region of My Mind," was entitled, "Down at the Cross," again another religious allusion. This long essay has a bipartite structure. In the first part Baldwin recounted his religious experience as a fourteen year old boy, about the age of his nephew, and his view of Christianity as an adult. He sketches out his disappointments with the Negro's religion, which he views primarily as escapist.

He then turned to his second mission, which comprised the greater part of the essay, to trash the Muslim movement among African Americans. Here he attempted to come to the grips with the phenomena of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X. Elijah's brand of Islam viewed Christianity as the white man's wicked rationale for oppressing blacks and that all white people were accursed devils whose sway was destined to end. God is black and his proper address is "Allah" and he has chosen black people of America to end the devil's domination by means of the theology of Islam.

In this long letter, Baldwin also described his audience with Elijah Muhammad, who Baldwin believed was lucid, passionate, and cunning. For Baldwin the problem was that Elijah preached a dogma of racial hatred that was no better than the reverse of whites' hatred for blacks. Baldwin rejected Elijah and Malcolm.

Baldwin believed he had a greater vision than Malcolm and Elijah. He believed that the Negro's suffering was redemptive and that's the Negro's example had curative powers for the nation. Baldwin wrote as part of closing statement.

Following this, Baldwin's hero in *Fire Next Time* is meek, gentle and treading carefully on the soil. The hero writes a letter of encouragement which he concludes this way:

It will be hard, James, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity.. You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest since Homer. one of them said, *The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off.*

Encouraging the blacks to shun inferiority complex and to strive to the development of their personal traits, Baldwin's *Fire Next Time* begins with a thirteen year old boy who is a Christian, a lover of God. But God seems to be far away as he could not help solve the plights of the blacks. When he notices that there are two Gods in America: Gods of the blacks and Gods of the whites, he desires to set himself free from any of the Gods and he warns and cautions that next time, "it gonna be fire". In the contrary, Wrights hero spills fire from the mouth without any prior warning.

IRONIC VISION AS CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENT OF VIOLENCE IN FICTION

Wright and Baldwin use ironies in the domain of their narratives to explain the forces in their American society in order to guide the readers in understanding the situations blacks suffer. This confirms the belief of Kafalenos "that narratives guide readers to discern a particular configuration in relation to which to interpret given events. Readers are led to include in a configuration certain revealed events and not others, primarily by the relation between a sjuzhet and its fabula-a relation that is illuminated by gaps" (Not Yet Knowing, 48).

For proper understanding of violence in African American literature, writers have explore the ironic vision in explaining the social framework of the society. According to Chidi Maduka:

Irony is a device for revealing, attacking or resolving contradictions plaguing society. The author uses ironic mode to portray the vision of society. This framework for understanding the process of social transformation (*The Intellectual*, 210)

Maduka examines the portrayal of irony to effect political change. The network of irony situates a vision of society. He further goes on to present various ironies in fiction as they portray political change which stimulates the interest of writers. He identifies irony of situation, irony of fate, irony of change, irony of life, irony of things, irony of circumstance, irony of events, irony of character, irony of illusion, irony of exclusion and irony of dilemma (139-211).

Both Richard Wright and James Baldwin explore the configuration of these ironies in shaping their works. Many instances in their corpus extrapolate this assertion. The movement and behaviour of Saul Saunders in The Man Who Killed A shadow and his personal disposition towards crime typify the ironic drive Chidi Maduka enforces. Similarly, James Baldwin's handling of religious wrangling and the reduction of the Blacks to the background calls the attention of ironic drive in the African American literary spirit.

The essence of these ironies is to show the "contradictions" in society. The fate of the down trodden, the essence of violence therefore

is an incompatibility between what they believe they are and what they are and not what they do to accomplish their objectives as ambitious writers who are aware of the contradictions in every human society (185)

The African American writers employ the ironic twist or the ironic vision to portray levels of violence in their narration. Although most of these narrations are classical because it renders or visualises the plot from the beginning, middle and end. At times, the story starts from the end and ends in the beginning! This ironic vision is in most cases actualised from the dictate of flashback which establishes a relationship between the society and art.

Whenever the Blacks come in contact with the whites, there is always a million psychological miles between them in speech, reaction, action etc. This is because the existing structure then did not give room for equality, equity and freedom which the races in America now enjoy! That was the reactions Baldwin, Wright, Ellison etc use their novels to explicate. Writers constantly use this instrument of ironic mode to effect a change politically, culturally, socially in America.

Killens vividly demonstrates the use of ironic mode in situating the plight of the African America in order to fully understand the portrayal of Wright and Baldwin when they satirises both whites and blacks in fiction. Killens uses Cotillon to ridicule the “Black Niggers” who discriminate against the “culturally deprived”, the light skinned looks down on the dark skinned. Killens heroine, the “Black and beautiful Yoruba” rejects inferiority complex. She replies her mother, Daphne who wants to make her white!

“I am so proud of myself mother, I don’t care what white folks think. I know I’m Black”(146). Killens uses ironic mode to propel the spirit of nationalism through Yoruba the protagonist who exhibits hope for blacks in diaspora.

In America, both whites and blacks are victims of irony because of their involvement in social injustice, thuggery, prostitution etc. The whites make the blacks to be socially and economically incapacitated. The blacks constantly attack white people and “behind any black man is the white police”. The position of these blacks when they attack the whites’ formation is to unleash terror to set themselves free from imperialism and domination.

Black writers use various forms of ironies Maduka itemised to propel the dream of living as blacks while the whites still keep their “inner minds”. The dream not to live in fear, alienation and psychological humiliation make the blacks to remark that:

We are not fighting to become like you. We respect ourselves too much for that. When we advocate freedom, we mean freedom for us to black, or brown, and you to be white and yet live together in a free and equal society. This is the only way that integration can bring dignity to Both of us (The Afro American in Literature, 53).

Irony to these writers combines sarcastic and didactic functions for the blacks and whites in America. It educates the whites and ridicules them for the essence to embark on a change. It educates the blacks and admonishes them against inferiority complex, destructiveness and the need to embark upon creativity.

The instrument of change and irony in black world according to Oguzie is to enhance Black Nationalism by negating racial perception (Oguzie, 36).

This literary instrument is what Wright and Baldwin evoke with their characters moving from one level in the fiction. Paradoxically, Wright's protagonist seems more brutal to the realisation of his dictates than Baldwin's. Houston Baker portends that Wright is too old fashion in the use of irony in realising the blacks' contemporary experience. He states that Ellison and Wright are more modern in the evocation of contemporary metaphor and irony in a better placement. However:

In later years of his career, one charge frequently levelled against Richard Wright was that he was old-fashioned, out of date and clinging (even in content and style) to the memory of a Jim Crow ethics that critics insisted had passed from the American scene forever. In a sense, this charge of datedness implies that memory—and particularly a "racial" memory—forestalls modernity. What I would suggest is that Wright's astute awareness of the interconnections among race, power, economics, urbanity, and technology in the United States (an understanding conditioned by, precisely, his southern racial memory and his own brand of Marxist analysis) enabled him to join a global company of thinkers' intent on achieving a black, global, and empowering modernity. Hence, he can be viewed as a black person who was not simply hurt, outraged, or terrified by United States racism, but also as a courageous black intellectual memorially informed by racial wisdom he acquired during his life under the aegis of southern Jim Crow and northern red-lining and racist political assaults. From the vantage of our turn-of-the-millennium moment, it seems ironic that the black intellectuals promoted during the 1950s by American literary economics and prestige to displace Wright was certainly likable men. They commanded more conventional literary elegance than Wright. But they were also strikingly parochial in their understanding, representation, and relationship to southern, black American life. Of the novelist Ralph Ellison's relationship to the South, the black political scientist Jerry Gafio Watts writes: "When reading Ellison's perceptions of the South one must remember that he did not experience the South from the vantage point of a native black southerner. Ellison's sense of possibility was decidedly that of a black raised outside the Deep South..."

Ellison only experienced the periphery of southern black life during the age of Jim Crow....Who but Ellison would have argued that attendance at a southern black college, life in a college town, and journeys to the countryside with the Tuskegee band would substantively immerse him in black life in the Deep South?"¹ And writing of the black essayist James Baldwin's journey of self-discovery and activism to the American South, the critic Daryl C. Dance observes: "His trip South so unnerved Baldwin that when he returned to New York, he collapsed, evidently suffering neurasthenia, or what he described as a paralysis resulting from retrospective terror."² The irony of Wright's American displacement is heightened, I think, if we acknowledge that neither Ralph Ellison nor James Baldwin possessed a fraction of Wright's intelligence with respect to the dynamics of an unfolding world of post-colonial colored people.(Standard Humanities Review,1999).

To Houston Baker, although Wright uses irony for a purpose, it could be better to classify his narratives from the classical perception through which Baldwin, Ellison and others got inspiration to excel in their narratives from all ramifications.

SYMBOLISM AND CHARACTERISATION IN WRIGHT AND BALDWIN.

Briefly describing Wright's handling of characters in his fiction, Houston Baker basically insists that Wright and other African American writers understand the trends of events and use fiction to express their narratives by portraying the instrumental forces, subsequently show that:

Wright's narrative, however, understands that black factory work is merely a way to counter white labor union initiatives. It is always contingent upon a power politics of racial exclusion. Though blacks may work cheaply for Western civilization, says Wright, they are never allowed to live equitably as citizens within Western civilization. Nevertheless, the Great Depression showed black and white workers their common class interests.⁶ The old black "folk consciousness" died an economically-motivated death during the Great Depression. Barriers of race and class were transcended by a beleaguered proletariat. The "Bosses of the Buildings" trembled before a new "communalism," if not an actual progressive Communism. Modernity, for Wright therefore—a Wright whose politics are completely alien to Ellison's philosophizing hibernation—is non-folk, industrial, and interracial proletariat (Standford, 1999)

Black writers have understood the symbolic nature of character in a work of art. However, they have realised the essence of characters to situate roles in order to effect drastic change. For a change to be experimental, Wright and Baldwin create revolutionary characters that identify with the dictates and social framework of the society.

These characters come in contact with things they detest and they strive for a drastic change. At a close examination, the behaviour of the character is dualistic: the first category identifies with the problem of the society while the second pretends as if the society is not going through any problem. Those characters that ignore the problem of the moment are not revolutionary. They are trapped by fear, intimidation and probably lack of vision. That is why one would remark that:

These levels intersect and affect the narrative dimension and the activities of the characters. The level of identity stands for the male nexus in the novel, while the alterity in the novel represents the female nexus (Social Responsibility, 86).

As for the African American, the behaviour of the characters in fiction tends to support violence. The perceived reason for this is predicated on the need to embark on a change of attitude- a change of negative attitude against the blacks. However, if the whites refuse to change, the blacks give it to them in greater dimension.

The character disposition of Saul in the novel of Wright is highly ridiculous. He meets other fellow blacks and drinks hard to forget the “sorrow inflicted upon him by the white folks” He kills Eva without even knowing he is killing somebody-a white shadow which has been haunting his generation!

He did not escape to a lonely place to hide his face because what he did to Eva “was to make her silence” not “to kill her or to hurt her”. This psychological trend is really terrific and dangerous. Bright’s self character is to reject anything negative. Fire Next Time is a quiet warning against depression and intimidation of a thirteen year old boy- a macrocosm of Baldwin himself.

Both characters are depressed and violent but in different interpersonal praxis. While Saul is dangerous and blood thirsty “I” the thirteen year old boy cum Baldwin character is only sending warnings and rejecting the concept of God for self identity. This view is what Ralph Ellison is trying to express when he says:

“If you practice violence against me, I mean to give it back to you in kind” (Ellison, 117). To express bitterness, African American writers create tragic and revolutionary characters that show dangerous inclinations whenever they come in contact with any white racist who insults and abuses. This simply underscores the simple fact that makes blacks to “own the night” and to be “invisible “at the same time. Many activities which the day cannot really accommodate were let loose in the nights. These include: killing, kidnapping etc.

Many other African American writers too imbibe this tradition of violent symbolism and characterisation in their canon. Prominent

among them is Toni Morrison. In Bluest Eye, Morrison portrays a new character disposition. The characters of children encapsulate the need to survive childhood in the midst of adversities. This novel x-rays tragic feelings among characters; these feelings demonstrate violence and depression. She opines that: "Pecola's tragedy is indeed a family tragedy, with roots in her parents past. Pauline Breedlove was unable to guide or protect her daughter, with her own attempt to create self respect and a place in the world having led to her to find refuge in another family"(60).

Tragic feelings among the characters of African American writers facilitate violence in the black narratives. This situation grossly affects the study of narratives. According to Stenberg, "in literary narratives both the suppression of information and its subsequent disclosure have to be quasi-mimetically accounted for, so as to avoid the reader's indignation at being cheated... (Not Yet Knowing, 54). The constant creation of radical, wicked, influential characters with brutal appearance in black fiction facilitate violence and fear.

These tragic feelings, however, portend psychological feelings among young black generations who quickly resist intervention when accosted. Characters in this regard are accosted various roles in fiction which symbolises one thing or the other. There is a coherent event which explains why the white audience were constantly gripped with fear so that America will not produce bigger Thomas' everywhere. The various expressions on the characters and their behaviours help in the understanding of the complicated nature of the condition of blacks in America:

I don't know that I can make a decision as to whether or not Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" addresses the "plight of the Negro in America" as, according to Wright, she should. I think that, on the one hand, she expresses the plight of the Negro in America as she has lived it; and on the other hand, she did not really have a "plight" per se. "Sometimes I feel discriminated against," she says, "but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me." So, clearly she did experience some of what Wright denominates the "Negro plight," but she openly chooses to not be affected by it. In fact, she goes on to say, "How *can* any deny themselves the pleasure of my company?" She chooses to be herself, even if it happens to be a "colored" self.

Some would argue that, yes, Hurston is not able to demonstrate the plight of the typical black American. She was not born into slavery, nor in a predominantly white town, but in "the little Negro town of Eatonville, Florida." The inhabitants, she says, were exclusively colored, and the only white people she knew were travelers, visitors, or

passersby. In addition to that, she saw the world in a Shakespearian way—from a stage: her front porch. She acted in the “theatre” of life; hence all that happened to her in the play of life mattered to her and affected her—directly. She is doing what a good writer does: write about what she knows, first hand. And, according to her, *this* is the plight of the Negro. “I am not tragically colored,” she says. “Slavery is sixty years in the past.” And she is correct. She does not see the point in being a “tragically colored” Southerner, when she has nothing to be tragic about; her life was a good one, until she turned thirteen (and, as we know in retrospect, when she later fell into obscurity and poverty (On How it feels to be coloured Me, 1989)

The above expressions of Natalya Delgado Chegwin shows the fear, domination, intimidation blacks and all the coloured people in America and in other areas suffer. Characterisation and symbolism in Wright and Baldwin were to show, reject, destroy this illicit perception, after all, pigmentation does not contribute to intelligence so the writers say.

LANGUAGE AND AESTHETICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Language is an instrument which writers use to portray their thematic preoccupations. Narratologists value the essence of language because it enables them to visualise various interpretations in the narratives. Channels of communications were made possible because of language and its recurring aesthetics. In this situation many writers employ various approaches in delineating their worldview in the essence situating one theme or the other. According to Arnold Berleant, language is the performance through which aesthetics are realised in literature. He opines that language is the total realisation of the effect of literature through the use of words, speech abstract features and other phenomena. He submits that:

There emerges from this discussion of language, literature, and literary art a matter basic to the argument which it is now time to face directly. If literature is a mode of speech, and speech is that activation of literature we call performance, we must identify more exactly what this performance involves and what it does not. In my comments earlier on language and literature, I found language to be a material from which literature draws, but a material that we usually regard in the mode of the written word, where it has an objectivity and an impersonality that

make it admirably suited to the function of formulating facts, executing analyses, and in general serving as the instrument of cognitive meaning. Yet our exploration of performance in poetry, drama, and the novel has revealed how the transformation of language in literature leaves it quite removed from its usual cognitive function. Since we are unaccustomed to envisioning language by any other than a cognitive model, it seems strange and difficult to cut it clear of such connotations. Yet this is the particular hardship the aesthetics of literature must endure, and its only hope of success lies in recognizing and overcoming the handicap of anti-aesthetic pressures.

Let me develop this by means of a contrast, a comparison between two vastly dissimilar uses of language - the analytic and the perceptual. The analytic is the customary use, sanctioned by common sense and common practice. Here language is a means of stabilizing the flux of transitory experience, solidifying it so that we can manage our world by managing our words. Yet ordinary and convenient as this is, to use it as the pattern under which to subsume literary experience is to blind ourselves to the very different way in which language functions in the literary arts. In literature, words forsake the dissecting table of literary analysis, leaving behind their character of means and becoming ends in themselves. In the literary experience we must follow Hart Crane's suggestion to the poet to become "soaked in words."

Speech facilitates such a linguistic immersion, for in our utterances language operates in a perceptual realm where the word is inseparable from the image. That is why literary language is hardly ever abstract but nearly always dwells on the graphic details of individual objects, situations, and events. While a philosopher may write a treatise on justice and a jurist search for principles and precedents, the writer sees the human significance of justice in the immediate realism of the particular case, for it is this which touches him, even though it be removed to the point of improbability. Hamlet's obsession with the crime committed by his mother and uncle is forceful and moving, even though the twentieth century would be inclined to a more clinical view of a man who converses with the ghost of his dead father. We find in novels like Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Malamud's *The Fixer*, and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* forceful and moving realizations of the different forms of injustice. Even Plato took up the

poet's pen in developing the model of a just state
through a particular Republic
(The Verbal Presence, an Aesthetics of Literary
Performance, 340-346).

African American writers knowing fully the social ills in the society they found themselves choose the appropriate language in exploiting the various ills through metaphor, language of analytical and perceptual were frequently illuminated. According to John Wideman, the African American is unique in this aspect language and architectonic construct in analytical and perceptual. In his expressions he states that:

Afro American must communicate in a written language which in varying degrees is foreign to our oral traditions. You learn the language of power, learn it well enough to read and write, but its forms and logic cut off, separate you from the primal authenticity of your experience, experience whose meaning resides in the first language you speak(18)

Consequently, Wright and Baldwin use language to delineate the aesthetics of the American landscape but in different perceptions. Both writers use language to extrapolate violence using different methods in their analytical and perceptual analysis. Wright use of language is more violent than Baldwin. The reason is that the extent of racism in the 1920s when Wright is a youth is enormous than during the time of Baldwin.

Wright employs linguistic praxis to x-ray “the natural resistance of a slave, balkiness, fear, suspicion, hatred and intimidation” This informs his creation of Saul in The Man Who Killed A Shadow and Bigger Thomas in Black Boy. Baldwin's use of language is to further put caution that racism would be vigorously resisted through any form of violence. This is drastically opposed to the view of Sonia Sanchez a female black poet cum academic who opines that “we need a poem that kills, a poem that kills the Yankee, that kills nigger; we need a poem that sucks blood, a poem that shoot guns, a poem that removes inferiority complex, a poem that shoots straight without missing” maybe she is believes in the word of Matthew Arnold that “poetry will safe us”.

Her linguistic approach to violence is dangerous compared to Wright and Baldwin put together! In addition to this, Black people have been using English as language of literary communication for hundreds of years to show various forms of resistance in America. “The English that black people speak has a distinct history, intertwined but always systematically in tension with the standard variety of English spoken by imaginary mainstream Americans”(20). Similarly, African American writers particularly, Wright and Baldwin use language to “mirror the dynamics of the social context in which it covers”(22). This is a portrayal of the American vision in literature and aesthetics. Wright and Baldwin create metaphors, proverbs, idioms, riddles and axioms to x-ray the forces of the American society. They explore some meanings about the manifestations of violence and the need to revolutionise the system.

Hurston reveals the American experience using connotative language in her novels help to situate the literary vision of Wright and Baldwin. She uses her novel Their Eyes were Watching God to typify how language is used to explore the complex relationship between black men and women. She is believed to use language as technique which gives” a new metaphor for social alienation” (40). This situation attempts to make room for the “portrayal of the new negro” (6).

This portrayal is, indeed, a manifestation that the African American writers are fully aware of the dictates of language and its essence for modification, correction, protest against hypocrisy and for the creation of awareness for both the blacks and whites in America. The only thing that is permanent is change and language and aesthetics in arts are products of change

Most Black writers use the first person point of view to narrate their fiction and to explain the forces of the society they found themselves. This is because the voice of the writer is the voice of the protagonist in any autobiographical writing. However, it is also prominent to use this device because it situates involvement and knowledge of the existing scenario. Richard Wright uses the first person in this narrative to explain the involvement of “I”. Wright is the extradiegetic narrator who creates Saul Saunders as an intradiegetic narrator that sees the ills in his society, and then tells the audience who responds through the “audience response approach” because of the complex nature of the situation.

Similarly James Baldwin writes his autobiography in Fire Next Time. He speaks through his intradiegetic narrator who narrates the ordeals of the Africans in Diaspora. This narrator did not detach himself from the society as some narrators do. He involves himself practically in the church activities, street activities and women activities “in the South were they keep living” The narrator begins to narrate his ugly ordeals from the age of thirteen till he becomes a man matured enough to stop following his Christian parents “in worshipping the white God.” For Wright, when his narrator lands in trouble, the audience no longer hear him speak. Pity and fear envelops the audience who reacts through the audience response approach. Both Wright and Baldwin distance themselves from their narrators as if they were not part and parcel of the victimised society. The reason for this is that:

If blacks were to survive according to the reasoning of the day, and if black culture was to be preserved. The first person would be more appropriate because it can vividly explain racism, individualism, crude materialism and anglophilia in all its diverse forms (Johnson, 36)

Both Wright and Baldwin employ artistic design to show their involvement in the system and to resist the domination of the white people culturally and economically. This reaction is to resist suppression in all ramifications. That is why Loomis says that “I use this type of writing and narrative praxis because I don’t need anyone to weep for me, I can bleed for myself”, August Wilson submits that Blacks use this pattern to “wrestle with ghost of the whites that have haunted blacks for decades” (300).

Consequently, August Wilson The Piano Lesson demonstrates persona because the extradiegetic narrator creates an intradiegetic narrator Boy Willie just like Wright and Bright who do not want to be swallowed up in the American problem, Saul and the thirteen year old nameless character of Baldwin need their freedom that makes Wilson’s Boy Willie to declare:

That’s all I wanted. To sit down and be at ease with everything. But I wasn’t born to that. When I go on the road and something ain’t right, then I got to try and fix it (40).

The system according to Wright and Baldwin is porous, that is why they embark upon different pattern of approach to revolutionise the scenario. Baldwin and Wilson believe that the system is “often distinguished as much by political circumstances as individual accomplishment” (20)

This individual accomplishment in the American literary dispensation makes them to employ “persona” and narrative architectonic construction through their narrators to show their involvement in the system and how they can make the system more meaningful to the new generation. Similarly, the “omnipotent narrative creation” which Both Wright and Baldwin put in their narratives project boundless freedom in the explanation of the dictates of the American society.

The ideal of the society makes the blacks to move towards integration in order to develop the African American socio- political experiment in art, music and other worldview.

CONCLUSION

This study examines violence in African American literature. It visualises a comparative analysis of Wright and Baldwin narratives in analysis with passing references on other African American writers. The narratological praxis of Jonathan Crewe is enforced here because I combine narrative context, content with critical analysis.

Using the ‘narratological tool, I examined Heroism, Ironic vision, Symbolism, Language application and aesthetic configuration to analyse the theme of violence in the canon of Wright and Baldwin with other narratives and critical works in analysis.

This research shows the various reactions black writers demonstrate in their works. The writers are of the opinion that various phenomena shape literature of their dispensation, they express this with various types of metaphors, riddles, axioms which are both conventional and particular to the American landscape.

This work is not intended to apologise racism or propagate it. It is within the academic praxis of criticising and evaluating the various

trends which shape violence and black literature in America. The need to subscribe to peace and tranquillity inform the research. Both Wright and Baldwin leave an indelible landmark in literature in their attempt to leave a lasting legacy in literature.

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