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When Individuality Becomes a Plight in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*

LORSQUE L'INDIVIDUALITE DEVIENT UN PÉTRIN DANS RICHARD WRIGHT *BLACK BOY* ET ALBERT CAMUS *L'ETRANGER*

Ghada S. Sasa¹Malek K. BenLahcene²

Abstract: This paper portrays both Richard Wright's and Albert Camus' depiction, within *Black Boy* and *The Outsider*, of man's struggle against their biased societies. More precisely, it sheds light on the state of Meursault and Richard as individuals seeking individuality in the face of their rigid social milieu. Making distinctiveness their main purpose, each protagonist approaches it differently. While Meursault alienates himself, neglects his society, defies it, and dies for his belief in honesty as well as the universal absurdity of the society, Richard decides firmly to leave his racist community, attempts to adapt himself to his society, alienates himself, defies all sorts of authority, uses words and stories to empower him, and heads to the North where he believes he can have a full meaning of selfhood.

Key words: Absurdity; Alienation; The individual; Society; Individuality; Honesty; Racism; Oppression; Struggle

Résumé Cet article décrit la représentation de Richard Wright et Albert Camus, au sein de *Black Boy* et *The Outsider*, la lutte des être humains contre leurs sociétés biaisées. Plus précisément, il considère l'état de Meursault et Richard en tant que des personnes qui cherchent l'individualité dans de leur milieu social rigide. Considérée la spécificité comme leur but principal, chacun des protagonistes l'approche différemment. Pendant que, Meursault s'aliène, néglige sa société, la défie, et meurt pour préserver son honnêteté, Richard décide fermement de quitter sa communauté raciste, s'adapter artificiellement à sa société, s'aliène, défie toutes les sortes de pouvoir, et se dirige vers le Nord où il croit qu'il peut avoir un sens d'individualité.

Mots clés: Absurdité; L'aliénation; L'individu; La Société; L'individualité; L'honnêteté; Le Racisme; L'oppression; La Lutte

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INTRODUCTION

Man's relationship with his entourage has always been an issue that attracts the attention of modern writers, readers, and critics. In Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, both novels focus mainly on tackling the relationship existing between the protagonists and their societies. Critics view the novels' treatment of this relationship differently. King (1980), for instance, asserts that "*L'Étranger* is concerned with man's search for happiness in a world that seems indifferent to all human desires" (p. 33). As such, happiness seems to be the main incentive of the novel's

¹ Ghada S. Sasa is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Yarmouk University, Irbid-Jordan. She received both her Bachelor degree and Master's degree from Yarmouk University. She obtained her PhD from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her main research interests are nineteenth and twentieth century American Literature, specifically American realism and naturalism. Yarmouk University, Jordan.

² Malek K. BenLahcene is currently working on her Master's degree in English Literature and Criticism at Yarmouk University. She has successfully completed all her coursework and will embark on writing her thesis. Yarmouk University, Jordan.

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protagonist to indulge in a struggle against his society. *Black Boy*, on the other hand, is seen by Jackson, in his "Richard Wright: *Black Boy* from America's Black and Urban Ghettos," as a story which "gives the intimate account of Wright's Southern background that only a black critic can make" (as cited in Ellison, 2009, p. 7). From this spectrum, the story seems to be a mere description of the Southern societal environment by an ordinary black. Ellison (2009) goes further to explain that "Richard Wright has outlined for himself a dual role: To discover and depict the meaning of Negro experience and to reveal to both Negroes and whites those problems of a psychological and emotional nature which arise between them when they strive for mutual understanding" (p.12). Through this short account of some critics' perception of *Black Boy* and *The Stranger*, the focus seems to be on the description of the novels as ones dealing with either the nature of these societies, or rendering the tension between the protagonists and their societies to some psychological factors such as the search for happiness or interracial understanding.

The present paper, however, focuses on Albert Camus through his *The Stranger* and Richard Wright through his *Black Boy* as presenting fanatic societies imposing on their dwellers a peculiar way of living giving much emphasis on conformity and obedience of communal conventional norms. In fact, both writers depict their protagonists, Richard and Meursault, as different individuals challenging their societies. Each of these protagonists, in one way or another, defies his societies; Meursault, living in his superficial society which focuses on appearances and behaviors to judge one's unrighteousness, breaks the norm and behaves unconventionally, and Richard, living in a racist society which focuses on fossilizing stereotypes of black-white relationships, revolts against such a demeaning system to insert his individuality. Through these distinguished attitudes and reactions, Meursault and Richard seem to be agents seeking change if not purification of their societies making of themselves a kind of tutor to those who may follow them. Though differently, both Meursault and Richard discern themselves as outsiders, but in their homelands, living in absurd societies where everything seems to be topsy turvey. As such, they alienate themselves from such a hideous entourage preferring to preserve their own integrity at the expense of social acceptance. These characters, Meursault and Richard, who are struck and disillusioned by their social environment react differently still making of alienation their primary outlet as well their main plight. In *The Stranger* and *Black Boy*, the quest for individuality, integrity, and uniqueness seems to be the incentive if not the pre-eminent factor that manipulates Meursault's and Richard's lives. They struggle, fight, suffer, and alienate themselves only to preserve their individuality.

1. INDIVIDUALITY FORMATION

Both protagonists are in a constant struggle against their societies. The protagonists quandary results from their society's nature and its out-of-the-way principles that should be revered. In other words, these protagonists are delineated as unique figures through their remarkable sense of acuteness which enables them to dissect and perceive the injustice their societies impose on them. As a result, they alienate themselves either to preserve or form their individuality.

Meursault, in existentialist terms, is an individual put into a riotous society in which individuals are free to espouse their own ethical codes, orientation, and even destinies. It seems that individuals, within such a social milieu, have to, in existential psychoanalytical terms, forge a personal "method destined to bring to light, in a strictly objective form, the subjective choice by each living person makes himself a person; that is, makes known and himself what he is. Since what the method seeks is a choice of being at the same time as being—which are expressed in this behavior" (Sartre, 1957, p. 81). As a matter of fact, Meursault tries to form his existence through being upright, or in better terms, frank: "He is totally honest, but honest in a peculiar way" (Solomon, 1974, p. 173)—a quality that later leads him to his downfall. King (1980) affirms this point though describing Meursault as avoiding "conventional reactions" whenever he is faced with a situation in which he has to express his thoughts and opinions (p. 44). Camus himself describes Meursault as a hero who:

. . . is condemned because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of private, solitary, sensual life. And this is why some readers have been tempted to look upon him as a piece of social wreckage. . . [I]f one asks how Meursault doesn't play the game, the reply is a simple one: he refuses to lie. . . He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately society feels threatened. . . For me, therefore, Meursault is not a piece of social wreckage, but a poor naked man. . . (as cited in Sherman, 2009, p. 61).

From this spectrum, social values, normally, are related to honesty, truth, and good conducts. However, in Meursault's society, the norm is to lie in order to please the society. This is clear when he refuses to go to C   ste's restaurant where he is tested by receiving questions which he should answer according to the social frame. Meursault prefers not to speak, or meet any one so that he will not be obliged to violate the principle that he cherishes—truth. Unfortunately for Meursault, he tries to forge his personality forgetting about his rigid social system, an absurd society that seemingly gives freedom to its people to shape their identities still with respecting its regulations.

While Meursault was condemned by his society due to his unusual honesty, Richard alienates himself through his revolutionary posture against the racial prejudices haunting his society. Interestingly enough, Richard's problems become poignant when he starts to cognize himself as a distinguished person. In that, Ellison (2009) in his "Richard Wright's Blues: Shadow and Act" confirms that "It is only when the individual rejects the pattern that he awakens to the nightmare of his life" (p.27). This feeling of apartness is a one used to both meditation and comprehension of the surrounding. Unlike Meursault who seems from the beginning living in his own secluded sphere, neglecting the others, and careless about any worldly issues, Richard is more efficient when it comes to approach his society. In that, throughout the novel, and especially at earlier stages, he questions everyone about phenomena occurring around him, but once he construes a clear vision about the very essence of his society he resorts to alienate himself. At the point when he becomes an "archetypal rebel who rejects all social norms" (Kinammin, 1995, p.102), society starts to perceive him differently. His Black entourage starts to put more pressure if not more violence upon him in order to conform to the existing norms starting from his grandmother, aunt, and uncle. Being convinced that he is different and that he must keep his standing, Richard says when he was at the orphanage: "Dread and distrust had already become a daily part of my being and my memory grew sharp, my senses more impressionable; I began to be aware of myself as a distinct personality striving against others. I held myself in, afraid to act or speak until I was sure of my surroundings, feeling most of the time that I was suspended over a void" (Wright, 1945, p.38). In other words, Richard attempts, through his intellectual sensibility and rising consciousness, to fashion a distinct personality. The latter gives the novel, *Black boy*, more than a biographical nature but a psychological perspective where self-discovery is of an overriding importance. This attempt, however, according to Tate (2006), is made harder due to the brutality of racism and the deprivation of Richard's home life (p. 47).

ALIENATION

Alienation seems to be the focal and shared characteristic between Meursault and Richard, still each one's isolation is different. Meursault's actions appear to be either stagnant and passive, or rarely, framed by some frenzy moments. The first instance of his stagnant nature is his denial of any promotion in work that, obviously, stems from his passive generic orientation towards life. When his boss gives him an offer concerning going to Paris he simply refused. He "had no ambition", and he "couldn't see any reason for changing" his life (Camus, 1979, p. 39). He is haunted by the absurdity of life that devours every sense of ambition or purpose. Wolfrey, Robbins, and Womack (2006) assert that Richard falls in a state of "despair in the face of a presumed lack of meaning or purpose of life" (p. 52). Besides his indifference, at least verbal and public, towards his mother's death, Meursault expresses no enthusiasm for the most seducing, attractive, and desired sort of relationship which is love, or in proper terms sexual and a conjugal liaison. When Marie, unconventionally, initiates the topic of marriage, he says to her:

I didn't mind and we could if she wanted to. She then wanted to know if I loved her. I replied as I had done once already, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't." Why marry me? she said. I explained to her that it didn't matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married. Anyway, she was the one who was asking me and I was simply saying yes. She then remarked that marriage was a serious matter. I said no." (p. 39)

He does not fake any feelings, on the contrary, he stays blunt and frank. Mary is astonished by his attitude which sounds extremely bizarre. Unlike all people, Meursault considers neither evolution in his career nor forming a family something of great importance but simply absurd—a point that makes him really strange and alien. In fact, this feeling of alienation is mutual; he feels himself a stranger to the social practices, and society finds him alien through his own labor.

Richard, on the other hand, proves to be a very active individual who desires to change not only his life, but also his surrounding. However, he gradually understands that he will not be capable of changing his society either abruptly, or through violence. Thus, he "develops through a progression from passive to resentful submission, to successful rebellion against the authority" (Cappetti, 1993, p. 258). Unlike Meursault who seems to be content with his monotonous life, Richard thrives to fulfill his ambition that he comes to believe that it can be fulfilled only through "withdrawal from the deadly symbolic order" (Tuhkanam, 2009, p. 162). Besides Richard's tendency toward alienation, he manifests an intense desire towards flying away. However, according to Tuhkanam, "such moments of avian alienation must not be dismissed as mere flights of fancy, a doomed search for "the airy rights of freedom" (p. 135). "To flee" however, "is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of the imaginary" (p.168). The flight, actually, is the only the means that may help Richard to shape his identity away from the imaginary and bogus codes that his surrounding embrace. However, Richard is presented as a character desiring a sort of learning. In other words, he is questioning everything so that he knows what to do, where to go, and when to go. Interestingly enough, even before questioning his mother about hunger, his absent father, the whites, and so many other things, Richard decides "to run away and never come back (p. 11). He knew that the South will never let him form a fully individual entity, but will lead him to be an emotional cripple who

believes in his inferiority. In that, he said "whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it" (p. 45), thus, "Again and again I vowed that someday I would end this hunger of mine... I had my own strange and separate road, a road which in later years would make them wonder how I had to tread it" (p. 140). This road was not only filled with travelling and hard work, but mainly with fighting. Fighting was the first thing that his mother taught him to do, not only through bodily violence but also through words. Unlike Meursault's passiveness, Richard's fighting makes him distinguished, alienates him, and helps him in heading towards a different life—a life that permits him to instill ethics and values which stem from the books and the stories he reads. These stories teach him the meaning of equality, humanity, rationality, intellectual sensibility and power of words. Thus, at the end of the book, Richard says

. . . I headed North, full of a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that the personalities of others should not be violated, that men should be able to confront other men without fear and shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars. (p. 285)

Though Richard and Meursault differ when it comes to their modes of life, aspirations, and vision of the purpose of life, they do resemble in the point that both of them are strangers in their own home lands. In Heidegger's terms, both Meursault and Richard are like "individuals who are like wise doorless and windowless, but this is true not because individuals are just isolated, but because they are *outside*, in direct relation with the world in street, so to speak. Individuals are not at home because there are no homes for them" (as cited in Wahl, 1949, p. 16). But, while Meursault thinks that he has no home and place to which he can belong to because the whole universe seems meaningless for him, Richard believes that once he escapes from his racist and absurd South, he may find a better entourage where the human being, or in better terms the Black, is respected.

In fact, Meursault was isolating himself from, what he thought, a meaningless society, a world experiencing chaos, seeking collective destruction, and a world with no future orientation or destination (Ronston, 2001, p. 6). However, this state did not last for a long time. The killing of the Arab was a turning point in Meursault's life; the crystal empire he has built suddenly broke, and "it was like giving four sharp knocks at the door of unhappiness" (p. 55). From this moment, Meursault no longer isolated himself, but it was society's turn to alienate and condemn him for his frankness. Meursault is a character "who is not only estranged but a one who is inherently strange besides" (Sherman, 2009, p. 59). Similarly, Richard craves for sequestering himself from this world which expunges any possibility for Blacks to establish their identities (Du Bois, 1945, p. 45). Richard expressing his disgust with his environment says "Not only had the Southern Whites not known me but, more important still, as I had lived in the south I had not the chance to learn how I was. The pressure of Southern living kept me from being the kind I might have been" (p. 284). Thus, he decides to push against his society. Richard's surrounding, unlike the one of Meursault, persists in trying to seduce and bring him toward conformity starting with his family's attitude towards religion and the whites, the principal of the school, his friend, and even his employer when he tries to persuade him to stay in the South .

Though both protagonists are offended by their societies, readers may see them from time to time pretending to adhere to their social practices not to be a part of their societies, but to fulfill their curiosity or simply to answer some wonderings. The latter springs when the individual is experiencing a state of estrangement, and wants to feel what would it like to be a part of such an obscure system. In that Kierkegaard asserts:

One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is stick my finger into existence—it smells nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How came here? What is this thing called the world? What does this world mean? Who is that lured me into the thing, and now leads me here? Who am I? How did I come to the world? Why was I not consulted, why not made acquainted with its manners and customs? (as cited in Spanos , 1976, p. 331).

Obviously, that is why we see Meursault accepting the requests of Marie for marriage, and of his friend Raymond in helping him to revenge from his mistress (p. 31). It is, also, what we see when Richard obeys his mother's quest for going to the church and accepting his friend's advice concerning how to deal with the whites.

This fluctuating attitude towards society may crystallize a major difference between the character of Meursault and Richard. While it is for Meursault a kind of confusion and loss, it is a means of comprehension and understanding for Richard. In fact, Meursault's dilemma starts not only with his community's interference in his life, but also with the emerging contact between them and his awareness of the destructiveness and hypocrisy of his entourage. The course of events manifests the extent of the alteration between the two parts; society as a proactive force and Meursault as a reactive individual. He experienced a "radical alteration of the natural thesis" which Spanos (1976) explicates that it "requires a continuing procedure of disconnection or bracketing which transposes the naively experienced world is neither to deny its reality nor to change its reality in any way; rather it is to effect a change in my way of regarding the world, a change that turns my glance from the real object as I take it, interpret it as real" (p. 328). In his conversation with Salamano, we perceive Meursault's maturity or, at least, the consciousness he acquires talking about the change in his

perception towards society moving from ignoring, avoiding, and shunning society to a state of cognizance, omniscience, and awareness. As if blaming himself for his previous dire state of marginalization, Meursault said "I still don't know why, that I hadn't realized before that people thought badly of me" (p. 43).

Richard, however, seems to fathom the nature of his society as well as his own purpose at an early age. The incidents and events in *Black Boy* encapsulate Richard's notable capturing of life's meaninglessness starting with questioning the hideous nature of war, the unjustified killing of blacks, the abuse of women, the violent gangs, and his mother's unfair suffering. All of these did but affirm his vision about his society as one which curbs the humanity and the ambitions of its inhabitants. At a very early age, twelve years old, he had a conviction that he can live only if he fights the meaningless suffering that his society imposes (Becknell, 1989, p. 1). Richard never seems to be confused about the nature of his social environment. He recognizes that he is different from the very beginning, so he decides to keep this difference in the face of such a society which devours any sense or desire for being different. Along his saga for preserving his individuality, he made of fighting his main defense mechanism. In such an absurd community, Richard was obliged to fight even his family members. Unlike Meursault who did neither recognize his society's nature, nor the necessity of fighting at early stages, Richard, interestingly, at the age of six accomplished his first triumph over his father. In here Cappetti (1993) says that each time Richard "emerges from a confrontation with a family member, the hero is able to keep his personality intact only through a progressive denial of kinship ties, the individual can thus subtract himself from the familiar institution and from its violence against the personality" (p. 259). Recognizing at an early age that he is embedded with a "notion of the suffering in life" (p. 127), Richard managed to find a way out.

The Stranger and *Black Boy* are novels about individuals who struggle for their integrity and individualism. However, each one tackles this issue from a different angle; while Richard challenges his society and succeeds in achieving his ambitions, Meursault seems to have a tragic end still with sustaining his standing. Unlike Richard who was struggling against his black and white community in a subtle manner, Meursault falls immediately in his society's trap. It seems that if Meursault did not kill the Arab, society could never condemn him his unconventional attitude toward his mother's death and he himself would never defy his society. Both protagonists are mistreated due to their atypical behaviors and attitudes, but while Meursault's society seizes the right the moment to punish him severely, Richard's one solicits him to conform to the already established social codes and never got the opportunity to punish him the way Meursault's society did with him.

One might think that Richard's society is of a harsher nature than the one of Meursault, but when it comes to punishment he or she would recognize how hideous the latter is in comparison to the one of Richard which even when it uses violence it is for the sake of conformity and fossilizing the existing white black stereotype.

This dire state of affairs is clearly seen in Meursault's judgments not over killing the Arab, but over not disclosing any apparent grief and mournfulness for his mother's death. As such, he finds himself "a marginal figure in a decentered universe where private and immediate sensations have displaced objective norms" (Kellman, 2009, p. 1). The norm in this defaced absurd community is focusing on appearances to judge the moral attributes of a person or any other phenomenon. When questioning the warden of the home, besides asking him about the nature of the relationship between Meursault and his mother, he was asked about the way Meursault conducted the day of his mother's funeral, and he answered that he neither cried, nor manifested the simplest features of respect to his mother's corpse. Another futile question that the judge, as a representative of societal power, asked to determine Meursault's destiny is whether he knew his mother's age or not (p. 82). As such, this society seems to not rely on the least inkling of rationality or sanity though its reliance on such absurd standards: "on the day after the death of his mother, this man was swimming in the sea, entering into an irregular liaison and laughing at a Fernandel film" (p. 87) is a statement that summarizes the whole policy of Meursault's society, a one based on utilizing trivial pretexts to ban and eliminate people. It is obvious that the whole judgment is but a social means that satisfies society's desire in exterminating any individual standing against its ordinance. At this moment, Meursault recognizes that "the more we struggle to achieve individuality, the more desperate the effort to liberate ourselves from the sway of social conformity and ritual, and the more poignant our inevitable confrontation with death" (Sprintzen, 1998, p. 1). This is a limitation that Richard never gives up to or believes in. The more he experiences injustice and social pressure, the more he becomes determined to struggle for his individuality.

Richard's problem starts when he realizes that his social environment prevents any possibility for a meaningful life, and this state awakens in him a new desire to satisfy his hunger towards living as a unique individual. Thus, he pushes himself towards searching for more through going beyond his society's confinement so that he grasps as much as he can of life (Tate, 2006, p. 48). Interestingly, his society does not punish him but resorts either to attract him or make him afraid of the consequences of making of himself a distinguished person. As such, one can see that while Meursault's society scourges him only at the end, Richard's one accompanies him along his life. In a way, suffering, hardship, pressure, and agony become an integral part of Richard's life. In that, McCall (2006) explains:

More weight is adequate to the horror and to the moral splendor of *Black Boy*. The community keeps piling the crushing circumstances upon him. As he grows, he grows to an awareness of just how heavy are the things pressing down on him. He refuses to give in. No matter how much "more weight" the culture heaps upon him, he will not die into the lowly "nigger" that they want him to be. (p. 26)

One can say that while Richard is shrewdly coping to live with and at the same struggle against his oppressive society to obtain the sense of selfhood he desired, at the right moment, Meursault is alienating himself till the moment he was stricken by his society's outraged attitude towards his unconventional egoism and individuality.

Meursault's predicament is extremely complicated and perplexing. Thus, a full comprehension of the period after killing the Arab should be thoroughly understood. After a long phase of a secure self-isolation, Meursault realizes the sordid nature of the society he was living in and for the first time he captures the hatred his surrounding specimen were imbued with against him (p. 83). He recognizes the zilch of his society and existence as a one which exhibits itself as a mere shadow owing to the absence of truth (Mihe, 2009, p. 232). From this moment, he was foisted into such a gloomy, harrowing, and most importantly alien entourage which resulted in his outmost distress and angst. Meursault's downfall lies in the fact that he could not conform to society or, in better terms, insert himself in a subtle manner in his society. Self-placement, from an existentialist viewpoint, resembles "... the desire of the child to find a primitive order in his world, or, perhaps to approach what transcends him by pointing to it. But the very ordering arrangement may be a clue to a still different problem: the location and realization of the primal situation of the self in reality" (Spanos, 1976, p. 329). The Gordian knot Meursault faces, in here, is his impotence to deal with current attacks of society.

Interestingly enough, Richard genius lies in his ability to secure an artificial position within his society though he knows that he has never and will never belong to it. In that he said "I did not suspect that I would never get intimately into their lives, that I was doomed to live with them but not of them," but "I learned to play the dual role which every Negro must play if he wants to eat and live" (p. 140). He endeavors to endure living within his racist society because he realizes that as long as the Black individual within his white community does not recognize the importance of locating, acquiring, defining, and rising above the absurdity of this society which affects him, he will never fulfill the quest for self hood (Tardon, 1993, p. 100).

CONCLUSION

Sartre (1957), in his *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, acutely delineates what Meursault is caught in and experiencing as a "rational man in an indifferent universe" (p. 173). Actually, Meursault is condemned for being distinguished with an exceptional honesty and for isolating himself from his communal orbit. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of lost home or the hope of a promised land" (Solomon, 1974, p. 180). This is the basic difference between Meursault and Richard: Richard's life is based on the hope of reaching a promised land. All of the alienation and struggle he experiences is just to reach the land that he has always dreamt of, a land that enables him to relish a full sense of selfhood. Richard explains, "I headed North, full of hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that the personalities of others should not be violated, that men should be able to confront other men without fear or shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars" (p. 285). Bleufiab (1972), in his *The Escape Motif in the American Novel: Mark Twain to Richard Wright*, explains that the interest of moving from one place to another goes back to the American tradition where Americans manifest a strong quest for the self through escape, migration, or simply seeking a new land (p. 8).

While Richard's society seems to be less denominating when it comes to realizing his dream, Meursault's one appear to fully taking control over his life. In fact, society represents, conventionally, a miniature of a divine power. Besides religious and judiciary regulations, society pervades people's lives. With the banner that god is dead, society seems to gain power over people. "If God is dead everything would be possible" Dostoevsky says, and "indeed everything is permissible if God does not exist, as a result man is forlorn". Furthermore, if God is dead there are no values or beliefs to decriminalize our behaviors (as cited in Sartre, 1957, pp. 22-23). Meursault's society embraced this parti pris and acted as a god. The judge's resonant words prove this point. He uses extremely decisive and authoritative statement like for instance "he must be punished accordingly" (p. 94). With the absence of what is labeled divine justice, Meursault was the scapegoat of the god-like nature of the society.

The only outlet for Meursault from this miserable state was death because simply "living is keeping the absurd alive" (Solomon, 1974, p. 180). He affirms that life was not worth living (p. 105). Thus, he is happy for his end describing it as a deep future which may overcome the enormous torment and the nausea he was feeling. He is the example of an *au fais* individual who "... might be a conqueror, imposing his will on the world. . . creating his will on the meaningless world" (King, 1980, p. 34). Meursault's triumph lies in his ability to stand for his values, refusing society's will, and favoring death. Meursault is, in fact, the epitome of an upstanding character who refuses to alter his cherished values either to please his hypocrite society or, even, to secure his survival and thus resorting to, primarily, alienating himself. In believing that a harmful truth is better than a useful lie, Meursault makes himself a full individual in the face of his dominating society.

Whereas Meursault's end may be ambivalent for some readers since he died at the hands of society, Richard's one bears no controversy. Since Richard's journey towards the self is not interrupted by a huge and devastating incident like

the one which happened to Meursault, one can argue that he succeeded in achieving his goal and he could make it (p. 227). Therefore, *Black Boy*, can be seen as a novel about the creation of the self in a Southern society. In such a society, Richard had to overwhelm many obstacles. The harshest one is to assert his ardent individualism regardless of the destruction and annihilation he was subject to. Throughout the novel, one can see the stark pressures and burdens society was imposing on Richard, but he stood firmly on his grounds and refused to give up for he believed that only under pressure that one can achieve one's self. (Hakutani, 2006, p. 93) In order to achieve the self, Richard believes that, one should desert such an absurd society, and he did. He headed north taking with him "a part of the South to transplant in an alien soil" (p. 284), a soil which he thinks that it will never oppress individuality, race, and freedom.

Just like Meursault who makes of honesty a means of differentiating himself, Richard makes of reading, writing, power of words and passion of books not only a distinguishing feature but also an agency for braking the chains of his society. He does so because he knew how society is petrified by writing due to its empowering effects once the person expresses himself through it (Kinnamin, 1995, p. 133). In "Granny is quite right", Tate (2006) asserts "in her assessment of reading stories as that of Devil stuff," she adds that:

When Richard turns his own hand to composition he begins with "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre." Art imitates life. But to say that Richard Wright turned to books that would imitate his world is merely to describe a deprived child's hunger for gory fantasy. The magic of words was not a mere reflection of the violence of his world in Bluebeards and mad scientists; words became triumph over that world. Words are the boy's assertion, his way of making the world recognize his existence. (p. 42)

Richard makes that clear when he says about Mencken that "this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon..." (p. 272). Thus, the idea of using words to step up from his hideous milieu came up to his mind. Using words, in fact, deepened his sense of alienation and individualism because the more one expresses himself the more conscious he becomes of his surrounding as well as himself. Words brought Richard what may be called a sweet suffering, the suffering stems from what one feels from his alienation from his society and a sweetness in his ability to express as well as assert himself. Such suffering, however, is indispensable for it "is the path of consciousness, and by it living beings arrive at the possession of self-consciousness. For to possess consciousness of oneself, to possess personality, is to know oneself and to feel oneself distinct from other beings, and this feeling of distinction is only reached through an act of collision with one's society" (McCall, 2006, p. 28). Ultimately, Richard, successfully, after a long saga of suffering and strife against his black fanatic tightly-knit community and the white racist society, becomes able to move towards the north anchoring himself by writing and reading stories and novels which were a kind of fuel in tempting him to seek more and more sense of individuality.

Both novels, *The Stranger* and *Black Boy*, can be seen as stories which depict dilemmas of human beings in the modern world. The main problem of the protagonists of these novels stems from the fact that individuality becomes a plight. In both societies of the protagonists, orthodoxy is considered to be the pillar of the ideal community and any sort of non conformity would lead to using the utmost security measures. Both of the novels depict the protagonists persisting in seeking the selfhood beyond the confines of their society and, thus, falling in a grim struggle, suffering, and agony. Though the means, the situation, and the ending of the protagonists differ, both of them were finally able to satisfy their desire; Meursault through staying honest and direct even at the expense of death, and Richard through going away from his racist society. As such, one can see that both writers through their novels intend to provide their fellowman with an example of individuals residing in an absurd entourage but defying it through their sturdy position. Through using these characters, both Albert Camus and Richard Wright excel in portraying individuals' dilemmas and sufferings in the modern world jostling for a niche of individuality for their existence.

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