Chapter - VIII

THE LAST NOVELS: RECKLESS EYEBALLING, THE TERRIBLE TWOS, 
THE TERRIBLE THREES AND JAPANESE BY SPRING

As in his earlier novels, Reed in his last four novels Reckless Eyeballing, The Terrible Twos, The Terrible Threes and Japanese by Spring too launches a scathing attack on the social, economic, political, religious and academic institutions of the American mainstream life with a Swiftian irony. While Reckless Eyeballing is a biting satire on feminism, literary politics, black militants, semites and neoliberals, The Terrible Twos and its companion novel The Terrible Threes assails the economic, political and social exploitation of the blacks by the whites in American Society. Reed’s last novel Japanese by Spring satirizes the sorry state of higher education in America. It condemns the racists, Japan basters, feminists and radicals. It shows that the blacks are the real and ultimate victims in the American society whether the establishment is dominated by the whites or the yellow Japanese race.

Critics have failed to account adequately for Reed’s last four novels and generally dismiss them as less interesting than his more controversial early writing.
For instance, Robert Elliot Fox remarks that Reed's *Reckless Eyeballing* seems to be an instance of the diminution of power of the 1980s has manifested compared to his truly innovative work of the 1960s and 1970s. But Peter Nazareth maintains that Reed in his last novels has not lost his fictional abilities. The last four novels seem more straightforward in their plots and messages, chronological in time and much less innovative and experimental in their narrative mode. But this apparent clarity is part of a complex and innovative style. This style can be characterized as rhetorical that its overall narrative strategies at the level of plot, theme and character are constructed primarily on the way the audience will read and misread the novels. Reed broadens the definition of the rhetorical aspects of the literary text as part of a larger attempt to reformulate how his works relate to the African-American literary tradition. Daniel Punday remarks that in Reed's last novels the


problematic reception of the work by the audience becomes the primary content. 3

In any case, in his last novels Reed's fundamental strategy as a satirist remains unchanged. His usual complex of penetrating satire, surrealism, allegory and farce for depicting the state of confusion and pain confronting the blacks in contemporary American society continues in his last works, too. These novels differ from the realistic naturalistic portrayal of the racism and sexuality as in Richard Wright's Uncle Tom's Children, Chester Himes's If He Hollers Let Him Go and James Baldwin's Another Country by Reed's effective employment of satire, myth, fantasy, folklore, irony and humour.

Reed's Reckless Eyeballing is a satirical narrative that mocks the American racial and sexual taboos and feminism which exposes the hypocritical nature of the American white's towards the blacks in the manner of George Schulyer's Black No More (1931) and Chester Himes'.

Pinktoes (1961). Gregory-Jay remarks that it is a Swiftian satire on the viciousness of mankind.  

In *Reckless Eyeballing*, Reed attacks the ideology of feminism which in his view creates victims, distorts history and denies or thwarts individual desire, enterprise and aspiration. It is in part a comic rebuttal to several works by black women since the Seventies like the works of Ntozake Shange and Alice Walker. These feminists' works showed a mood in which black women began to question myths like whether freedom was to come first for the blackman or blackwoman. Reed's thoroughly comic vision sets him apart from most other contemporary writers who address serious political and social questions. Here Reed finds expression to his anger at what he perceives to be negative characterization of blackmen in black fiction and drama. He is critical about Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* which shows up in Reed's novel thinly disguised as Tremonisha Smart's play *Wrong-Headed Man*.

Reed conjures a conspiracy theory in which black feminists are pawns of white feminists in their war

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against black males. It is a caustic satire on literary politics. Reed castigates what he perceives as a conspiracy between whitemale publishers and black female writers to subjugate blackmen by incorporating a negative depiction of them in their work. In *Reckless Eyeballing* the targets of Reed's satire are feminist playwrights, Jewish producers, lesbians, New York intellectuals neo liberals and Black Militants. George Lamming remarks that while he satirizes feminist characters and their hidden agenda, he does not attack the general principles of feminism. In an interview Reed says thus:

"A lot of ideas in *Reckless Eyeballing* are based on feminist ideas. And I had read books by feminists and actually barrowed some of their ideas and characterizations for that book".

Feminism as part of his racist 'motif' in his fictional world is Reed's target in *Reckless Eyeballing* and the specific issue through which he reveals the politics of deethnicization of America. It is particularly a destructive form of racism in that its prejudices are not only allowed but exalted by liberal consciousness. Reed takes an anti-feminist stand. It is


premised on the belief that the real vitality of black culture is male and that blackwomen who challenge the tradition invite the destruction. Reed’s most successful satire has always managed a degree of balance or at least of distance. His satiric reflections on the black nationalists worked because he had a measure of sympathy for his target as the nationalist impulse was not alien to him. But Reed has no sympathy for feminism as he equates feminists with fascists. For, he finds some assailable extremes in the women’s movement such as demogogic undemocratic tendencies. Robert Elliot Fox remarks thus:

"However to equate feminists with Nazis seems to be going too far."  

George Lamming remarks that Reed’s caricature of feminism grossly oversimplifies a broad and diverse social movement equating the whole with one of its minor and meanest elements.

At one level Reed in *Reckless Eyeballing* appears simultaneously indicting and validating Jews, feminists and failed artists through a dialectical disputation.


between rival theories, fantasies, facts and emotions engaged in by various characters. This allows him to make his case against his enemies while at the same time appearing to present a variety of viewpoints silly and serious and paranoid and playful. David Rimmick observes that Reed's *Reckless Eyeballing* has no contemporary relevance and the themes he deals in the novel are worn-out and outdated. The feminists, the academic black Marxists are all figures who seem more appropriate to a work of a decade ago.

Though feminism is one of the central issues in this narrative, Reed subordinates it to his larger cultural critique of racism. *Reckless Eyeballing* is basically about the parallelism between the Jewish and African-American experience. Like Loop Garoo Kid, La Bas, Quickskill and Robin in Reed's earlier fiction, Ian Ball is essentially a Trickster figure. Hailing from the South, brought up under the influence of his mother, he comes to New York to escape from the influence of his mother and make a career as a playwright. He embraces feminism and identifies himself with the mainstream American culture for survival.

in the white dominated literary establishment. His shrewd and subtle maneuvering of the weaknesses of the feminists to his advantage yield no positive gains and falls a victim to their manipulations. Trimonisha Smarts, a black feminist writer is used as a pawn by the white feminist Becky French in her game against the blackman. Finally, when the veil of feminism is removed she comes back to her ethnic roots and starts seeing things in the right perspective. Randy Shank and John-Kranshaw who oppose feminism are victimized and are driven to near madness by feminists. Flower Phantom ties up black feminists and shaves off their hair explaining that is what the French Resistance did to those women who collaborated with Nazi.

Reed adopts the technique of signification to signify upon the conventional African-American trope of double consciousness which Du Bois speaks of in his *The Souls of the Black People*. Ian Ball is cursed with double-headedness. This conventional trope defines black consciousness as split into two identities, one consciousness of being a black and the consciousness of being an American. The reconciliation between the two selves is the key theme of the most common and traditional form of African-American writing. But in *Reckless Eyeballing* Reed is not using the trope of double-
He revises double consciousness as two-headedness. Daniel Punday observes that Reed uses it to refer to the split-consciousness in Ian Ball that implicitly parodies Du Bois's trope. The two-headedness is of two types. The first is a tendency to like an individual of a particular community but hate the community as a whole and the second is the tendency to like the community as a whole but hate its individuals. The tension between these two forms is the central conflict in the novel.

Ian Ball is born with two-headedness. The dialectical role in a single personality as a black male playwright appearing to appease the feminists by day and as Flower Phantom attacking feminists by night is the consequence of a split personality he suffers from. Throughout the narrative Ian Ball is torn between a genuine black self and an inflicted white identity. As American society demands assimilation into mainstream culture as a pre-requisite for success, Jim Minsk, the Jewish director, Ian Ball and Trémonisha try to move away from ethnicity. But Reed insists that the preservation of

ethnic identity and contact with the group's culture is vital for creative writing. Reed shifts the emphasis from double-consciousness, a concept based on the logos of Western civilization to the double-headedness, a concept based on African-American Hoodoo.

In Reckless Eyeballing Reed exposes how the Americans of Seventies and Eighties were under the grip of Nazi phobia and fascism. The ghost of Hitler continues to haunt both Europe and America. Reed equates feminism with facism. Becky French allots the well equipped Mountbatten Theatre to a play on Hitler's wife Eva Braun/Eva Braun's Honeymoon. She defends Eva Braun as a victim of male ego. Robert Elliot Fox remarks that in Reckless Eyeballing the Nazi mystique is everywhere.11

Reed exploits lynching ritual in the depiction of the killing of Jim Minsk, a Jewish director. Jim Minsk is lured to South to be honoured by ceremonies at Mary Phegan College. Their ceremony for Minsk begins with the pastiche of anti-semitic scapegoat tropes starting with the responsibility of Jews for the murder of Jesus

progressing through a Jewish Dracula's thirst for Christian blood claiming in Mary Phegaro's murder. When Jim Minsk starts running from the theatre, he is chased and lynched by the audience. Gregory Jay remarks:

"Here Reed is skewering and satirizing the role of sacrificial scapegoating in the production/cultural identities."12

Reckless Eyeballing is an expression used in the South to describe a blackman's glance which a whitewoman could accuse him and get him lynched. Reed's novel takes its title from the ritual sacrificial killing of young Emmet Till because he supposedly looked too long at a white girl in Mississippi.

Reckless Eyeballing is a melodrama with elements of farce. It abounds with Hollywood cliches and soap opera vignettes. It has a scenario like quality derived from television, radio, cinema, comic books, cartoon strips and pop art. As in his earlier novels, Reed here incorporates the newspaper headlines and radio and television news in the text. For instance, the exploits of Flower Phantom are invariably reported through newspaper headlines or television news and they are never shown directly. It is

customary with Reed, as in Greek drama, crime and violence is reported through newspaper headlines and not shown directly.

Reckless Eyeballing self-consciously appropriates aspects of familiar forms—in this case the detective formula and search for selfhood motif—but then demolishes these structures by introducing his own distinctive blend of discontinuity, verbal play, jive talk and outrageous humour. The sub-plot of the novel is formulated on the structure of the literary sub-genre detective story in which a Flower Phantom ties and shaves off the hair of the feminists and the detective Lawrence O'Reedy sets out to trace the culprit and unravel the mystery of the crime. Unlike the HooDoo defective Papa La Bas in Mumbo Jumbo and Last Days of Louisiana Red or the criminologist Nance Saturday in The Terrible Twos and The Terrible Threes, O'Reedy is not a serious detective. He appears to be a humorous character. In a conventional detective story the rational analysis and logical analysis of the clues available helps the detective to solve the crime. But in Reed's novel the conventional norms of the detective story are violated. O'Reedy's rational analyses and logic deductions fail to solve the mystery of the Flower Phantom. At the end of the narrative the mystery

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of the crime is suddenly revealed by chance. Ian Ball's mother opens her son's bag and to her great astonishment she finds hairs of different lengths, hues and textures in the bag. It proves to be that the Flower Phantom is none other than the protagonist of the novel Ian Ball himself. 

Reed strongly feels that the conventional Euro-American generic assumptions and codes have to be broken as the first step towards presenting a genuine African vision of life.

Reckless Eyeballing exploits HooDoo beliefs and rituals for fictional purpose. Reginald Martin remarks that in Reckless Eyeballing, Reed moves toward unearthing the universal structure of vodoun. Ian Ball's mother lives on the ancestral Caribbean island where she practices ancient rituals. These include the tactical use of Hebrew Obeah to solve the problem of the double-consciousness. The name of Abiahus, the first wife of Ian Ball's father, is a variant of Lilith in vodoun. She curses Ian Ball that he will have two-headedness. This plays a major role in the novel in shaping the destiny of Ian Ball. Ian Ball's mother makes all efforts to save her son from falling a victim to two-headedness.

It is to be noticed that in the last three novels the omniscient narrator comments on racism, semitism, feminism without focusing attention on the dramatization of the action and character of the narrative. By way of authorial intrusion, Reed discusses at length ethnicity, position of Jews and blacks, and African-American literary tradition. Such lengthy discussions and commentaries, while supplementing to approach and understand the racial and feminist themes focussed in the novel, break the spell of suspension of disbelief or artistic illusion of the narrative. Brent Staples remarks that a devilishly funny plot line is discussed by arcane asides and stories on ideological camps he wishes to demolish.\(^\text{14}\)

Though for the most part Reckless Eyeballing is a straightforward narrative and fiction of social realism, Reed extensively exploits fantasy in the form of the dreams, hallucinations and nightmares to dramatize the obsessions, and the complexities, the inner feelings, emotions, the psychic state of the characters and subconscious motives and feelings. The narrative begins with the dream of the protagonist. Ian Ball is subjected

to hallucinations, nightmares and fantasies. Detective Laurence O'Reedy sees in his dream the people whom he has sent to gallows. He has a vision of a man sitting in a chair. The three Spanish guys he has shot appear in a vision before him. Ian Ball's mother has precognition. She can sense and foretell events by telepathy. In another fantasy O'Reedy sees an Amazon woman raising before him.

The ending of the novel provoked mixed feeling from the critics. Daniel Punday feels that it has a neat ending.\textsuperscript{15} The stylistic and structural clarity of the novel calls for a next ending. The completeness of the novel's closure suggests that Reed does more than simply provide a clearly structured and focussed novel. He manipulates that structure to encourage the reader's overwhelming sense of resolution at the end of the novel. Shamoon Zamir is not satisfied with the ending of the novel. He remarks that the ending of the novel is sudden and inconclusive. In one of the interviews Reed says that

\textsuperscript{15} Daniel Punday, "Ishmael Reed’s Rhetoric Turn : Use of Signifying in Reckless Eyeballing," \textit{College English} 54. 461 (April 1992) 458.
the novel has a surprising ending for it is based on "trickster figure".  

The Terrible Twos and its companion novel The Terrible Threes form a grotesque satire on the political and economic situation of America of 1980s. They focus on contemporary America with its movie star President, passion for military war/ monopoly capitalism and increasing gulf between the haves and have nots. They expose the differences and inequalities of race, gender and class existing in America Society. Here Reed's targets are the white who seek cultural, political and economic control over what he considers a diverse, creative and potentially great multicultural American society. They chronicle two conspiracies/one between big business, the White House and an imposter St.Nicholas to take over the Christmas business and the other a conspiracy hatched by a gang/four to eliminate all the surplus, infirm and minorities and the African continent as whole.

The world Reed depicts in The Terrible Twos comes very near the world of HARRY SAM of The Free-Lance.

Pallbearers in its greed and obsession with production and consumption leading to physical and spiritual pollution. Reed anatomises the evil influences of monopoly capitalism in such forms as economic, social, military, cultural and religious control. Reed comes close to Baraka's views in his condemnation of the evils of monopoly capitalism. Their critiques are similar but Reed does not embrace socialism as an alternative. His solution to the evils of American society is multiculturalism.

Reed offers folkloristic material as the key to resisting the homogenizing oppression of the dominant culture. America's arrogant self assumptions about itself are shown to be the selfish attitudes of a terrible two year old child. The legends and folklore challenge their national egocentricism by showing the central image of consumerism in Santa Claus to be a figure who cannot be reduced to a symbol of accumulation. Significantly his black companion voices through him his refusal of a materialistic orientation. Reed weaves Rastafarianism and a verse of the Todd Cliffton dummy sequence from Ellison's *Invisible Man* together with Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* for satirizing the monopoly capitalism in contemporary American society.
The time of the novel is roughly Christmas 1980 to Christmas 1990 and it is clearly an allegory on the beginning of Ronald Regan's first term as President and the consequences in the 1990s. Regan brings a spirit of meanmindedness to the land. Reed's fictional President Dean Clift, an ex-model has close resemblance with President, Ronald Regan, a Hollywood show. There are some similarities between Reed's novel and Gore Vidal's Myron and Duluth in their focus on American Presidency. In The Terrible Twos Reed combines satire and parody to attack white Eurocentred ideologues of domination and power control. Ivan Gold remarks that The Terrible Twos is a blend of political comment, legend, historical analysis, irony, third world consciousness and pure rage. 17

The Terrible Twos is a surrealistic variation on the social realist novel of economic complaint. Reed attempts to fuse surreal puppet show and realistic relationships. In an interview Reed says:

"I call it (The Terrible Twos) a social realist proletariat novel inspired by the murals of Orozo." 18


Stanely Crouch calls it an all American novel. The world that Reed develops in the narrative is quilted with endless allusions, mythologies, improvisation and concentric circles of time and culture. Though Reed has rejected realism and surrealism as the ways of depicting fictional reality, in *The Terrible Twos* and *The Terrible Threes* he invariably resorts to surrealistic techniques. He uses the technique of interior monologue to lay bare the inner motives, inner conflicts and subconscious motives of the character. As a part of his narrative technique, Reed jerks the action to stop from time to time to summarize the developments as Reed is dealing with the events taking place in America over a decade.

In *The Terrible Twos*, Africa as a world power comes into direct conflict with America politically and economically and threatens America's existence and this prompts the behind scene rulers of America to conceive the desperate solution of Operation Two Birds also known as The Terrible Twos. An artificial famine is created to deprive the "surplus, infirm and non-vitals" of the benefits they receive. "The Gang of Four" plan to drop a

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hydrogen bomb on New York and Miami and throw the blame on Nigeria. This will have the double advantage of getting rid of a large number of the blacks and the Jews as well as giving an excuse to destroy Nigeria.

The narrative structure of *The Terrible Twos* is based on Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* with its Christmas Past, Christmas Future, a Tiny Tim figure and a variety of Scrooges. The plot follows a typical Reed pattern. As in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed here harps on a conspiratorical theory of history. He focuses on a conspiracy to make the image of Santa Claus the private property of the North Pole Development Corporation. Opposed to this monopoly are the Nicholities led by Boy Bishop and Black Peter. The plot to monopolise Santa Claus and the plot to eliminate the 'marginals' and destroy Africa come together as the President is taken to Hell by St. Nicholas. Finally, the conspiracy of the Colorado Gang is exposed and the President is saved.

Reed blends satire and parody in *The Terrible Twos* to expose the political, economic and social domination of the whites over the blacks in contemporary American society. In *The Terrible Twos* he parodies Charles Dicken's *The Christmas Carol*. The first part of the
narrative 'A Past Christmas' fictionalizes the global and national disarray prevailing around the time of Christmas 1980. The second part 'A Future Christmas' projects the awful days of December 1990 when the gulf between 'the vitals and the surplus becomes unbridgeable. Eberneiger Scrooge in Reed's narrative is less a character than an incarnation of 1980 Yuppie America. In spite of the grim and gloomy picture it gives about the desperate condition of the marginals, it retains Dicken's optimism.

The novel's title derives from the common phrase that describes the psychic state of two year old children and Reed employs it as a metaphor for an America two centuries old. America is reduced to a selfishly infant state that of a two year old who is never satisfied with what he has and craves for more.

"The two year olds have very bad taste. Life to them is a playing anyway. Their plate will be full but they will have their eyes on everybody else's plates."

In an interview Reed says thus:

"The name is inspired by the petulance of the people of United States who are very fortunate yet who are always perplexed and complaining about things like two year olds."


Linda Hutcheon remarks that the satiric attack on the economic and political condition of the America of 1980 is vehicled by the right metaphor of the two year old child. Reed uses the metaphor of the terrible twos in much the same as Gunter Grass in The Tin Drum had used little Oskar’s refusing to grow beyond the size of a three year old. The allegorical nature of both the images is clear. Reed uses the metaphor both to illustrate and undercut the power of the centre. Bernard W.Bell remarks that the sign of the fantasy world of two year olds is used to satirize the selfish heartless mood of President Regan’s America. The title of the novel also refers to America and Russia - the two superpowers. It has a reference to the Christmas past and the Christmas Future, to the Second Coming and to a plot hatched by the Colorado Gang to eliminate the minorities under the code Operation Two Birds.

In The Terrible Twos Reed maintains the implicit notions of Hoodoo while using the main story line to


resurrect another apocryphal tale, the legend of Santa Claus and his associate Black Peter. Kathryne Hume observes that Reed thinks of HooDoo magic as possibly all that will work against so entrenched and densely a fabric of complicity and crime.24

Through the central figure of the ventriloquist Black Peter, Reed makes his clearest statement of the integral relationship between HooDoo spirit and artist. He says that the loas speak through the artist. He was a descendent of slave. He was ordinary. Someone named Jah made it possible for the Emperor to speak through him. Like the HooDoo artists Bartriville in Mumbo Jumbo and Quickskill in Flight to Canada, the ventriloquist explores the full power of HooDoo art by assuming control first of a white religious organisation and finally of the American Presidency itself. James R.Lindroth remarks that with the final equation of HooDoo art and political power, Reed makes emphatic connections among the spirit world, the world of art and the political world.25


'Cross road figures in Vodoun are associated with elevators' explains the authorial voice by way of justifying the breaching of the conventional boundaries of narrative time, because 'going from time to time is like riding in an elevator' (p.126). Time travel and travel to the unseen worlds receive their aesthetic justification from this HooDoo notion of communication with the spirit world and both kinds of travel are validated by the aesthetic discourse carried on throughout the tests of Reed’s complex fiction. The artist freely manipulates time and space. The synchronic and perodic structure of the text sustains suspense as befits a detective novel as well as takes the reader out of a simple linear structure to make the text’s pace swifter. Diachronic time does pass in the novel but since the chapters are periodically arranged with linear indications removed the reader is unaware of the time passage until a chapter displays a temporal index.

In HooDoo, time is a circle and thus there is a possibility that the mighty will fall. Rex Stuart, the former popular actor of the Soap Opera Sorrows and Trails, falls from his high popularity. When he assumes the disguise of Santa Claus in Zumwalt's Big Worth Development Corporation, he learns through suffering to be more
concerned about those less fortunate. HooDoo remakes him. It is the same HooDoo power that enables St. Nicholas to influence President Dean Clift and bring about in him a radical moral reformation and St. Peter to help the poor and the needy.

Reed leaves overt HooDoo reference as a sub-text and concentrates on Rasta Nicolite myths revitalized by Black Peter. He reminds us of the pagan roots of many of American cherished mysteries and contrasts the vibrancy of ancient ritual with the spiritual ardity and hypocrisy of the present. In *The Terrible Twos* and *The Terrible Threes* reggae and Rastafarianism are Jess Grew's latest manifestations. Rastafarians believed that the whiteman is inferior to the blackman and Haile Selassie, the leader of the Rastafarian Movement in Jamaica, is the living god. They believed that blackmen will soon get their revenge by compelling whitemen to serve them. They insisted on deliverance from poverty and humiliation. Reed also concentrates on the myths of power and privilege created by the vital people. Operation Two Birds and the racist politics of the Nicolites are essentially thwarted by inexplicable circumstances which stem from some aspect of the supernatural power of HooDoo. Reginald Martin remarks that by including the fantastic tales of Black Peter and
corrupt corporations and government systems, Reed ridicules the structure of western history.  

Reed employs European and Christian legends and folklore for challenging the national egocentricism of the white American Society. He grossly subverts the legends of Santa Claus, St. Nicholas and Black Peter for undermining Judeo-Christian Western civilization. The image of Santa Claus is central to Reed's narrative. He turns to one of the central legends of the dominant American culture/Santa Claus for evidence of imaginative and moral freedom. Such a choice is in tune with Reed's aesthetics. Though Santa Claus, St. Nicholas and Black Peter are figures drawn from the Christian mythology, Reed transforms them into African HooDoo Trickster figures by investing with HooDoo powers and magic. African-American folklore, HooDoo power and magic prove to be the antidotes to the Judeo-Christian Western civilization and culture. Reed chooses European and Christian legends and myths to expose the inherent contradictions in their own values and ideologies.

By a court verdict, The North Pole Development Corporation gets exclusive rights of monopoly over the use of Santa Claus image during the Christmas. Reginald Martin observes that in Reed's novel Santa Claus who is controlled by Black Peter exemplifies the way HooDoo fights the specific kinds of selfish evil. Contrary to the expectations of the audience at Thanksgiving Parade, Santa Claus talks at length about the sufferings of the people and appeals to them to boycott Christmas sales and war toys. In a way Santa Claus typifies American monopoly capitalism. One of the ironies of the ubiquitousness of Santa Claus, a symbol of giving, is that he presides over a season of increased sales in a materialistic society. Santa Claus is put on television for advertising goods and this indicates how religion is misused for commercial purposes and economic gains. It is usually believed that Santa Claus comes down the chimney and gives presents to children. But the Truth Tabonach Church maintains that Santa Claus is a satanic imposter and child abuser and his coming down the chimney is a myth.

Reed plays upon the variations of the legend of St. Peter. He presents the competition between St. Nicholas

27. Ibid., 105.
and St. Peter for popularity by doing good deeds. St. Nicholas is a model capable of producing endless variations. Reed makes use of the European legends of St. Nicholas in some of which he is vaguely disrespected figure accompanied by a small man named Black Peter. According to Reed, stories differ as to whether Nicholas or Peter was the servant. Nick is a devil. But Reed's devil is a hero and champion of the poor. Robert Elliot Fox remarks that if the Pope is the policer of orthodoxy, St. Nicholas, like Loop Garoo Kid in The Yellow Back Radio Broke Down, is the promoter of heterodoxy. St. Nicholas, who rides on a white horse operates on a wider plane helping and reforming men in high positions and ranks. He takes President Dean Clift to American hell where the former American Presidents receive punishment according to the crimes they have committed. He discloses the operation Two Bird's to the President and brings about a radical moral transformation in him. He influences Justice Taney's judgement against Conversion Bill and thereby indirectly helps Dean Clift to regain his Presidency. He makes the Congressmen to confess their crimes on Television.

Black Peter is a Trickster and artist figure. As with the traditional Black Trickster, he works for small gains not revolutions. Even though he is not a VooDoo figure like Loop Garoo Kid or Papa La Bas, he serves the same function as the vehicle through which Reed attacks the structure and images of white American Society. He rescues orphan schoolboy Tommy and Beechiko, an American-Japanese woman writer. He helps a poor singer Moog. His replacing of the portrait of St. Nicholas by the portrait of St. Haile Selassie has symbolic overtones. It indicates the growing assertion of black supremacy in a white dominant religious organization.

Though for the most part *The Terrible Twos* is a surrealistic variation on the novel of social realism, Reed invariably exploits fantasy for fictional purpose. In a fantasy St. Nicholas takes President Dean Clift through the American Hell. Reed uses fantasy to dramatize the subconscious motives of the characters and their obsessions. The sexual adventures of Nance Saturday, the criminologist, is presented through fantasy. He makes love to Cleopatra and Irene Castle. His inability to get on with the in-laws of women he dated is shown through fantasy. Pope's burning of Malidari Cardinal to ashes with rays of his eyes, and Satan signing a contract with

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Rev. Jones to spread the kingdom of Evil on earth— all these are shown through fantasy.

St. Nicholas takes President Dean Clift to the American Hell. Here we are reminded of Dante's Divine Comedy Inferno where punishments are given according to the crimes committed. Reginald Martin remarks thus:

"Here Reed syncretically uses aspects of the Greek Hades making the punishments inventive enough to fit the crimes." 29

Dean Clift and St. Nicholas are greeted by the former Presidents of America who are punished for their political crimes. Reed contrives the fantasy to bring about a radical moral transformation in Dean Clift and makes him develop sympathy towards the poor and the needy.

Reginald Martin considers The Terrible Twos a Detective story. 30 Nance Saturday a reporter/criminologist is to investigate the mystery and find the real Santa Claus. Jamica Queen, a reporter, is probing into the mystery of Black Peter. Nance Saturday also takes the investigation of Rastafarian sceptre like object which would give power over all the nations. He differs from

30. Ibid., 102.
the HooDoo detective La Bas or Laurence O' Reedy in The Reckless Eyeballing in that he never uses HooDoop to unreal the mystery.

Creatively fusing several ingredients like a gumbo including the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, the hagiography of the traditional model for Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, Charles Dicken's A Christmas Carol, Dante's inferno, the novel of social realism and Rastafarian vacisan symbolism, Reed's novel shows how a tiny group of people seek to make a profit as the express of blacks, Jews and the vast poor. As an inventive and daring novelist, Reed's voice emerges as one of the black community's most salient and subtle voices of social reform.

Reed's ninth novel to date, Japanese by Spring is a bitter satire on the state of higher education in America in the twilight of the twentieth century. His targets of attack-black studies departments, the women's movement, multiculturalism, political correction, male chauvinists, xenophobes, radicals, liberals - all are skewered in their present forms as essentially political ideologies intended to maintain the status quo while masquerading as a search

for the truth. Reed mainly focuses on the political battles within academic circles especially among black intellectuals whose presence dates from the affirmation era.

In Japanese by Spring Reed's fundamental posture as a satirist remains unchanged. It is full of plots and counter-plots. It fuses together at a single place all his previous work. Tom Howard remarks that Japanese by Spring is a humorous and explosive new novel. Marle Rubin remarks that Japanese by Spring is a shrewd, and instructive satire. Reed's wit, focused by four decades of literary party-crashing, is a pop-culture particle beam aimed at the nuclear area of Right and Left Orthodoxy which reveals their common base elements - propaganda, self interest and arrant nonsense. Summing up Reed's achievement in Japanese by Spring, Tom Howard remarks thus:

"If nothing else, this outrageously funny book will guarantee Reed's place as the pre-eminent satirist of this century." 33


33. Tom Howard, rev. of Japanese by Spring, by Ishmael Reed Multicultural Review 2 June, 1993: 56.
In *Japanese by Spring* Reed exposes the pseudo-intellectuals, feminists, racists, and radicals that harbour centres of learning in America. Reed's fictional Jack London College serves more as a battleground for conflicting ideologies than centres for promoting knowledge. The pseudo intellectuals promote racism, feminism, Eurocentricism and suppress multiculturalism for their personal gains. The students and the faculty suffer from intellectual deficiency. There is professional rivalry and sexual harassment among the teaching community. Alcoholism, violence and drug abuse are rampant on the campus. Albert Wilhem remarks that Reed aims his satire at academic follies and phobias. 34

As in *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* and *Reckless Eyeballing*, Reed in *Japanese by Spring* attacks feminism. He exposes the well heeled black feminists of the fictional Jack London College who claim themselves to be victims trapped by systematic racial and gender discrimination. At Jack London College, feminists collude with racists in their game against blackmen. Reed ridicules the shallowness and hypocrisy of April.

Jokujuku, the Japanese feminist who seems to champion the cause of the oppressed underclass females in the ghettos but ironically insists on a computer equipment, two secretaries, a bodyguard and a house in Oakland. Jack Milch and Puttbult embrace feminism without conviction and make use of it as a means of attaining personal advancement. The hypocrisy of Jack Milch, the leading feminist of Jack London College is exposed when he is arrested by police for keeping his wife and child in confinement for ten years.

Just as he explodes the myth of American Dream which to the blacks proves to be more a nightmare than a bliss in The Free-Lance Pallbearers and the myth of the Old West and El Dorado in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down, here in Japanese by Spring he explodes the myth of Japanese Success which in no way liberates the blacks from eternal slavery and oppression. Whether the establishment is dominated by the Whites or the Yellow race, the blacks continue to be the real victims. Reed asserts the existence in America and Japan of reactionary elements that have clout over power structures. He attacks the subtle maneuvers by Japanese Right Wingers and their possible collaboration with American counterparts. Tsunehiko Kato remarks that Reed's satire of the
reactionary elements of America and Japan is an example of the exaggeration which often characterizes his narratives.35

The first plot of the novel traces the events that lead to the betrayal of Chappie Puttbutt by the Whites and the Blacks and denial of tenure to him in Jack London College. The second plot which concerns with the Japanese take-over of the college is connected to the first plot through Puttbutt's interest in Japan and the Japanese language.

Expelled from the Air Force Academy for his illicit love affairs, Puttbutt joins the White dominated Jack London College as Junior Professor on tenure basis. He becomes Neo-conservative and openly supports the Whites and blames the Blacks for their plight to appease the White establishment of the college. Despite all his efforts and shameless endorsement of White power structure, he is denied tenure. When his Japanese language teacher Dr. Yamato is made the President of the College, Puttbutt becomes the most powerful man on the

campus and takes revenge on those who have humiliated him and denied him tenure. But his association with the Japanese does not last long and he is soon fired. Thus Puttbutty is double crossed and victimised first by the Whites and next by the Japanese. His supporting of anti-affirmation action, his supporting of feminism, his learning of Japanese language, his supporting of Japanese chauvinists, his turning to New Criticism—all are the strategies that a black victim adopts for survival in a white dominated hostile American society.

Reed continues the tradition of novel of ‘social realism’ though in a modified form. He adopts satire, irony, black humour and exaggeration to dramatize the predicament of the black victim in a white dominated American Society. Japanese by Spring is a comical exploration of the aspirations and ordeal of a young, naive black professor for achieving professional advancement and social status. The agonizing experience of the black victim, his existential struggle for survival in a hostile environment is either sentimentalized or presented in the naturalistic mode. On the other hand Reed makes a hilarious, witty and entertaining comedy out of the materials fit for tragedy.
As in his earlier novels, Reed here pleads for multiculturism as an antidote to the suppressive Judeo-Christian Western monoculture. Peter Nazareth remarks that *Japanese by Spring* presents true multiculturists versus hostile right-wing groups, cause pimps and opportunists. Reed views nationalism whether it is white nationalism or black as the chief foe and cultural diversity, the internationalist multiculture as the antidote to any one culture's attempt to dominate others. The novel suggests that all those who teach and promote western monoculture are racists in disguise.

Jack London College serves as a battleground for the cultural warfare between monoculturalists and multiculturists. It is established with a view to promote Western culture. Miltonians, Eurocentrics such as Crabtree, Obi and Matata discourage multiculturalism on the campus. But when the college is taken over by Japanese, its President Dr. Yamato starts Department of Universal Studies. Sanya is assigned to teach Yoruba to students. Reed, the character in the narrative, associates himself with Glossco United, an organization devoted to promotion of multiculturalism in United States. He advises his boss Jack

Only not to finance the anti-Glossos who are single visioned, mono-culturalist and racist. The anti-Glassos maintain that Eurocentricism should be at the core of the American curriculum and they are keen on protecting and perpetuating the mythical glory called western civilization. Reed express his hope that multiculturalism will win over monoculturalism thus:

> The diversity movement would win "The Battle Books" because it includes artists. The other side was made up of bureaucrats, critics and historians.  

At the end of the narrative, Reed envisions the emergence of a true multicultural society in United States. Ninety thousand people, some in traditional Yoruba costume witness the Festival of the Lake, an African ritual. The rich variety of food, dance and entertainment arranged at the Festival is indicative of the American society as a conglomeration of cultures.

> "This is the way United States would look ... a meeting at the General Assembly in the United Nations."  


38. Ibid., 224.
The narrative ends with Reed's vision of harmonious coexistence of multicultures in America.

"Just then a beautiful black butterfly with yellow spots collided with his chin and flew away".39

A considerable part of Reed's narrative is devoted to Puttbutt's learning of Japanese language under his tutor Dr. Yamato. Puttbutt gives an elaborate description of the beauty and charm of Japanese language. Reed the character in the narrative learns Yoruba under Sanya. He admires Yoruba for its beauty, charm and poetry. From his study of Yoruba, Reed finds that some of his views are no different from those of the ancient Africans. It enables him to build a conservatism upon the spirit of Yoruba and to be free from "Puttbutt Conservatism". Crabtree too expresses his joy in learning Yoruba thus:

"Learning this new Language. Learning a new language and a new world. Discovering Yoruba. I have learned a language that transports me to a culture that's two thousand years old."40

The experience of learning a language and its effect in modifying the character, psyche and the behaviour of the individual is central to the narrative. Peter

39. Ibid., 225.
40. Ibid., 155.
Nazareth remarks that the struggle to learn each language, the successful use of expressions from each language and concepts and ideas expressed through each language becomes part of the novel.  

Reed’s text is interwoven with Japanese and Yoruba words. A Yoruba song in praise of Oladâmare is given in English transcription. Reed narrates a story from Ifa, an Yoruba epic. Reed’s Japanese by Spring is not only a plea for multiculturalism but the very text is a multicultural text. From the beginning of his artistic career, Reed is concerned with building up a true multicultural text. Though, after the necessary wreckage of form in The Free-Lance Pallbearers he constructs a viable HooDoo form in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down, his search, like Jes Grew’s search, for text continues in Mumbo Jumbo. To a certain extent, Reed’s Flight to Canada is an aesthetically satisfying text. Japanese by Spring is the culmination of Reed’s efforts to build a truly multicultural text.

Just as he has used the Osirian myth in Mumbo Jumbo, the Antigone myth in The Last Days of Louisiana Red, the Tlingit and Raven myths in Flight to Canada and

41. Peter Nazareth, rev. of Japanese by Spring, by Ishmael Reed, World Literature To-Day 67 (Summer 1993): 610.
Rastafarian and Nicholite myths in The Terrible Twos, here in Japanese by Spring, he exploits the Yoruba myth to dramatize the black experience in white dominated American society. By employing the myth of Olodumare, Reed transcends the limits of novel of social realism and protest tradition and thereby universalize the black experience.

At the end of the narrative Ogun Sanya, a Yoruba teacher who resembles La Bas in Mumbo Jumbo gives an elaborate account of the resurrection of Olodumare, an Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent Yoruba God who lies dormant in the African-American experience. In the past the Africans were in contact with Olodumare. But after the Great Severance, the wrestling millions of people from Africa, the diaspora has lost contact with Olodumare. Sanya blames the despair 'Onnu' that exists among all classes of African-Americans as they have lost connection with Olodumare. Reed explicitly states Sanya's mission thus:

"Sanya has a mission. He would straight out the gulf between the Africans and the diaspora."42

Sanya firmly believes that Ogun will resurrect Olodamere and contact with Olodamere can be restored and the despair that exists among the African-Americans can be eliminated. Reed attributes the despair that exists in Puttbutt which leads him to stoop down to any level to appease the white racists and Japanese chauvinists for his tenure to the loss of connection with Olodamere.

Oakland, with its towering hills serves as an ideal and effective backdrop of *Japanese by Spring*. Reed does not give a vivid and graphic description of the topography of Oakland. It does not remain as a mere physical background but it is integrated with the theme and action of the novel. The changing fortunes of the protagonist is reflected in the physical occurrences that takes place in Oakland. Oakland Hills symbolizes Puttbutt's life-long ambition to possess a house in Oakland Hills. Puttbutt says, thus:

"I gaze up there (Oakland Hills) everyday." 43

Puttbutt survive many earthquakes and the great fire that breaks in Oakland Hills. When he is denied tenure, there is an earthquake in Oakland. When he is fired from service by Dr. Yamato, a great fire breaks out. The

frequent earthquakes and other natural calamities to which Oakland is susceptible symbolizes the setbacks and shocks that the protagonist Puttbutt receives in his professional career. In many respects Oakland serves as an ideal background for unfolding the black victim's existential struggle for survival in a hostile white dominated American society.

As in his previous novels, Reed in *Japanese by Spring* resorts to elaborate authorial commentary on the raising power of Japan, curriculum in Universities and multiculturalism. Though it seems to intrude and retard the progression of action, it forms very much a part of the narrative. The authorial comments supplement our comprehension of the issues raised in the novel. Edward Hower remarks that Reed's asides often blow holes in the plot-lines. In his earlier novels Reed has created characters such as Loop Garoo Kid, La Bas, Raven Quickskill, St.Nicholas and Black Peter who serve as his mouthpieces to project his Osirian view of life. To some extent, Ogun Sanya serves as a spokesman for Reed in *Japanese by Spring*.

In *Japanese by Spring* Reed goes a step further and appears as a fictional character. He mainly appears to deliver asides about the beauty of the Yoruba language, multiculturalism and African-American folk religions. Reed as a fictional character has no major role in the narrative as he does not contribute to its action. The ideas of Reed as a character and Reed as a writer are similar. But Steve Brzezinski remarks that it is difficult to determine whether the fictional figure Reed is intended to mirror or correct the views of the author. Edward Hower calls the fictional figure Reed the alter ego of Reed, the writer. Albert Wilhem remarks that Reed as an intrusive character in his own novel at times lets commentary overpower the richly comic narrative.

Many critics have complained that the ending of the novel is unsatisfactory as Reed abruptly drops Puttbutt.


from the narrative. But his abrupt disappearance from the narrative is in accordance with the thematic structure of the novel. Both the intellectual climate of the Jack London College and physical environment of Oakland are hostile and uncongenial for the mere survival of the black victim. It appears as though the two hostile forces conspire against Puttbutt and cause his exit. The termination of Puttbutt's services from the college and his forceful evacuation from the Oakland by the police result in his exist from the narrative and hence it is justifiable.

By employing satire, myth, folklore, fantasy and black humour Reed effectively fictionalizes the existential struggle of the blacks for survival in an hostile environment and successfully turns the agonizing experience into a hilarious comedy. Thus in his last four novels, Reed, while following the conventions of the novel of social realism to some extent, effectively employs satire, irony, parody, myth, fantasy, folklore and black humour to dramatize the predicament of the black victim in the white dominated American society. He suggests that the only way of resisting the homogenizing oppression of the dominant monoculturalist American Society is the folk-
lore material embodied in the spirit of St. Nicholas, Black Peter, Rastafarian myth and the spirit of Olodumare.

There is a purposeful progression in his last four works both thematically and structurally by the evolution in his world view from feminism as part of racism, leading to multiculturalism. Multicultural text, with its origin in *Mumbo Jumbo* though partially fulfilled in *Flight to Canada*, finally reaches its culmination in *Japanese by God's Spring*. To this extent "text" is centrally instructed by the multiculturalism as a predominant 'motif' in his last narrative venture.

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