Chapter-II

NEO-HOODOOISM

Like the other fine arts, literature springs from basic beliefs about man's relation to the Mystery, the Source, Energy, and God. The belief in the unseen or metaphysical underlies much of the black writing. Reed's basic beliefs are VooDoo. Although preoccupied with myriad injustices engendered by the Western civilization, Reed is primarily concerned with establishing an alternative aesthetic which he terms "Neo-HooDoo". Bernard W.Bell remarks thus:

"At the heart of Reed's Neo-HooDooism is a belief in the power of the unknown particularly as expressed in artistic freedom and originality." 1

Reed's Neo-HooDoo which massively overshadows the dimensions of the black aesthetic provides a basis for understanding the thematic and structural concerns which animate his work. Neil Schmitz remarks that the course of Reed's experimentation with narrative has increasingly involved his conception of Neo-HooDoo as a literary form. 2


Many contemporary mainstream White American writers such as Pynchon, Acker and Monter and African-American writers such as Paul Marshall, Toni Cane Bambara, Toni Morrison and John Wideman have drawn from Voudoun. An understanding of the basic tenets of VooDoo would help us to approach Reed’s use of Neo-HooDooism as a narrative strategy in his fiction.

VooDoo is in fact one of mankind’s most highly refined ancient religions. It is the ancient African vision of man’s relationship to mystery. It has no arguments with any one theology in particular as it has absorbed Christian elements, too. Yet, Reed views it as counter tradition to the officially recognized beliefs of the Judeo-Christian faith. It is undogmatic. VooDoo is a pluralistic religion in which there is always room for one more loa or spirit. Frequently, a loa takes possession of one of the faithful. The possessed worshipper actually becomes, for a time, the loa. The world is understandable in terms of the interplay of loas. Just as a loa will manifest itself at different times and places and through different people though still recognizably the same, specific people and events are manifestations, recognisable, recurrent impulses.
When African VooDoo migrated to America, it assumed the name HooDoo. Pope the Innocent in Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* defines VooDoo as "the American version of Juju religion". HooDoo was very much influenced by Catholicism. It is a ritual syncreticism that incorporates the rites of several African ethnic groups into one kaleidoscopic religious drama. It is this concept of syncreticism that Reed turns into a fruitful literary method.

HooDoo has historical roots in its New World emergence. It has developed its folk theology about the world, humanity and destiny. There are many parallels between the VooDoo spirits and Catholic saints. Most of the Catholic saints have been appropriated as African loa. Thus Legba the Voudoun god of communications is also the Catholic Saint St. Peter, the one who holds the key, the one who opens barriers of communication between God and humans. His symbol is a cross, which in Voudoun represents the crossroads, to the Catholics, the Cross of

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Jesus. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams remark that Vodoun and Catholicism exist in a symbiotic relationship.

Reed's Neo-HooDoo is essentially an African aesthetic concept. It is largely constructed from the residual element of syncretic African religion Voudoun, Pocomania, Candamble, Macumba and HooDoo in the Caribbean Americas, especially Haiti, Brazil and United States. In The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas an ex-slave gives Douglas a certain root which would protect him from the White master. The root is the black magic. Neo-HooDoo in effect stresses the power of that root. It is this piece of Africa given to Douglas and then forgotten by Douglas that Reed strives to redeem.

Reed never takes credit for inventing the system of Vodoun. Though he was probably the first one to use it extensively as a literary method, these techniques nonetheless have been around for centuries and so he calls them, "Neo-HooDooism". It came out of his personal experience as it represents his need to find something with which he could be at home. Though the Black

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Nationalist Movement has influenced his need to find a different approach to art and writing. Neo-HooDoo is formulated essentially as a reaction to Western literary standards. In an interview with Reginald Martin, Reed says that he wants to modernize the whole thing (VooDoo) and bring it out of woods and use it as an appropriate technique of art. He asserts that VooDoo is the fundamental aesthetic of African-Americans.

Reed admired Blake and Yeats who created their own systems or received their own culture. He was inspired by his reading of the two British writers. He too wanted to create a mythology closer to himself. Reed's reading of Larry Neal's *Black World* in which juju was used must have stimulated him to create a system of his own. Reed's art draws from traditional visual arts such as painting and sculpture and modern electronic media, cinema and television because art in VooDoo terms means primarily visual arts. He uses HooDoo as a literary method. Robert Gover remarks thus:

"Reed's art is an articulation of this ancient African religion (VooDoo) and it is the soul of his voice as artist".

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Helen Lock remarks that it is Reed's appropriation of the VooDoo aesthetic that locates him within the African-American literary tradition.

Reed's Neo-HooDooism can absorb European, African and Native American ideas. Neo-HooDoo myth, the embodiment of the Dionysian spirit is not a racial myth though it is of black origin. In his collection of poetry Conjure Reed unequivocally asserts that Neo-HooDoo, "this new direction", in Afro-American literature constitutes "Our Turn", a radical severance of the destinies as a writer from the fate of white contemporaries. Apparently, the final poem "Introducing A New Loa" transforms William Burrough's emblematic, the dying light of Western civilization into a swinging HooDoo cloud, the birth of new Africanized universe of discourse.

"... ... Greetings from the swinging HooDoo cloud, way up there the softest touch in Evening, doing a dance they call. "The Our Turn".8

VooDoo culture has subversive functions. Reed's aesthetic can be called art of subversion for Reed?


subverts literary genres and this subversion of genres owes to VooDoo. Helen Lock remarks that Reed takes the literary forms of the West and transforms their meaning and his formulation of this transformation of meaning is Neo-HooDoo. In VooDoo, we have the dismantling of the logocentric hierarchies. There is no subordination of 'sign' to 'signified'. It revitalizes the independence of the 'sign'. Words themselves become instruments of power and control. VooDoo recognizes the existence of more than a physical reality. In one of the interviews Reed says that VooDoo is modern in that it recognizes more than one reality.

In VooDoo, Guede is considered as a powerful loa. He is always invisible and manifests himself by maintaining a subject as a rider mounts a horse, then speaks and acts through his mount. Reed as fictionalist seeks to enact the functions of various loas of VooDoo. As Guede, he challenges the authority. He conjures up President Abraham Lincoln, Warren G. Harding, Dwight Eisenhower and

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religious figures such as Moses and Pope Innocent. Keith Byerman remarks:

"Reed embodies the spirit of Guede. As Legba he connects the physical world with the spirit world. As a loup garou he invades various genres and reshapes them to his purpose." 11

Reed believes that HooDoo loas or spirits speak through the artist as he improvises them. Reed invokes Antibon Legba, lord of crossroads, the initiator, opener of gates and opportunities, he who leads the way before, the perfect deity for guiding into the text, the embodiment of the point of intersection of the real world and the psychic world. Reed's fiction exposes and denigrates the oppressive nature of Western culture, so as to free the non-Western voices, which expresses life and creativity. And this very act of exposure is 'the saying of words' which in VooDoo practice give one access to the spirits. Keith Byerman remarks that Reed serves the function not only of Guede but also of the houngan (priest) whose litany opens the way of the alternative world. 12


12Ibid., 218.
The chapters in Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* are separated by two circles (0, 0) the white plain and the dark circle. Robert Elliot Fox remarks that the circles stand for the dual African-American tradition of eloquence—talking bad and talking sweet and at the same time as a non-verbal signifier, and it counters logocentrism.13 The dual symbolism of black and white is apt for Legba as an intermediary between two different realities just as a text is among other things an interface between imagination and action, creativity and interpretation.

Papa La Bas, the HooDoo detective who appears in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, is an American version of the Haitian Papa Legba and the New World incarnation of the Fan divinity. Legba is synonymous with the Yoruba Orisha Eshu, a trickster-figure who mediates between the human and the divine realms. Robert Elliot Fox remarks thus:

"The trickster is, in a way, the patron Saint to Reed's HooDoo enterprise".14

13 Robert Elliot Fox, "Blacking the Zero: Toward a semiotics of Neo-HooDoo," *Black American Literature Forum* 18.3 (Fall 1984) 96.

Eshu, the Black Interpreter, is the Yoruba god of indeterminacy, the sheer plurality of meaning. He appears in Reed's work as the Loop Garoo Kid in *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* and as Raven Quickskill in *Flight to Canada*. Tall tales of how the weak overcome the strong through wit, toasts of urban tradition, positive humour and other neo-African literary forms - the entire folk tradition is to Reed a vast reservoir of HooDoo ideas and he hopes to add fresh interpretations by modernizing its styles.

Reed's Neo-HooDoo is formulated essentially as a reaction to western literary tradition. In his Introduction to *19 Necromancers From Now* Reed says thus:

"One has to return to what some writers call dark heathenism to find original tall tales and yarns with the kind of originality that some writers use as found in poetry - the enigmatic street rhymes of some of Ellison's minor characters or the dozens. I call this Neo-HooDooism a spur to originality which prompted Julia Jackson, a New Orleans Soothsayer when asked the origin of the amulets, talismans and charms and potions in her workshop to say "I will make my stuff. It saves me money and its good. People who has to buy their stuff aren't using their heads".15

This concept focuses on such ancient rites as conjuring, magic, VooDoo, which Reed maintains, will purge African-Americans of Western conditioning and ultimately help them to regain their freedom and mythic vision. It is essentially a return to the magical possibilities of word and object.

Reed has found a way of writing fiction unlike those decreative and self reflective fictive modes in which his white contemporaries are imprisoned. He conceives HooDoo as not merely a theory and practice of religion and medicine but as a whole approach and attitude. He is careful not to establish Neo-HooDoo as a school or dogma. It is rather a characteristic stance, a perspective, a mythological provenance, a complex of attitudes and the retrieval of an idiom but, however, broadly defined, Neo-HooDoo does manifest one standard refrain—Reed's fiercely professed alienation from Anglo-American literary tradition. It is distinguished by the total integration of the arts and life and scatting—that is free improvisation and adoption to local conditions and new possibilities. Ultimately then Neo-HooDoo is a political art as responsible as Richard Wright's Native Son but without Wright's grim realism or political separatism that characterizes Imamu Baraka's work.
Heed's Neo-HooDoo insists on improvisation, creativity, artistic freedom, and power of intuition and commitment to pluralism. The Voudoun religion, from which Neo-HooDoo is derived, is a pluralistic religion and it is always open to new loas. Reed uses this openness to new loas as a symbol of artistic innovation and in *Mumbo Jumbo* he refers to the cornmeal and water drawings called 'Ve Ves' which are used in Voudoun to invoke the loas as markings indicating an invitation to "new loas for New Art". Reed's Neo-HooDooism, is founded on the principle which advocates that every individual creates his own aesthetic for himself, just as each priest or "oum'phor" is a law unto itself following the traditions of VooDoo but modifying and changing the ceremonies and rituals in various ways. Neo-HooDoo encourages the artist to use "whatever he wishes in whatever combination he wishes in order to tell a story.

In a poem entitled "The Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic" Reed begins with a recipe for Neo-HooDoo Asthetic which resembles a recipe for Gumbo. The difference between the recipe for the Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic and the one for plain Gumbo is that the former allows the cook to improvise.
"The proportions of the ingredients used depend upon the cook." 16

It not only requires a variety of ingredients but can also be prepared in a variety of ways. Reed thinks that the Black artist should be given freedom to improvise for without this type of freedom the artist loses his ability to formulate human experience. The black artist innovates only within the ancient but vital cultural tradition of VooDoo, projected as a liberating consciousness. He establishes his integrity by refusing to abide by the grey rationalist forms. He deconstructs the old genres and replaces them with newer and livelier forms. He replaces rationalism with magic and intuition.

In his "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" Reed emphasizes the creative aspect in Neo-HooDoo.

"Neo-HooDoo believes that everyman is an artist and every artist a priest. You can bring your creative ideas to Neo-HooDoo. Charlie Yardbird Parker is an example of Neo-HooDoo artist as an innovator and improviser. 17

The improvisational centre of Loop Gerro's art in Yellowjacket Back Radio Broke Down is stressed by one of his adversaries.

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17 Ibid, 21.
"Loop seems to be scatting arbitrarily using forms of this and addressing his own. He is blowing like that celebrated musician Charles 'Yardbird' Parker improvising as he goes along." 18

Reed rejects the prescriptiveness of the Old Black Aesthetic particularly its progressive bias and insistence on social purpose in art. His only article of aesthetic faith is that art should have no creed. At the same time he shares with the Old Black Aestheticians its renunciation of Western culture, Pan-Africanism and interest in black folklore and the oral tradition.

Neo-Hoodoo shares with the Black Aesthetic its renunciation of the Western culture. It is offered as an alternative to the values of the collapsing West. It rejects the prescriptiveness, its progressive bias and its insistence on art's social and political function. Neo-Hoodoo believes in artistic freedom, indispensibility of individual inventiveness and intuition. In Shrovetide in New and Old Orleans Reed emphasizes creative freedom of the artist. He remarks that "the mainstream aspiration of the African-American tradition is for more freedom including freedom of artistic expression and individuality.

and not slavery. Reed writes in "Catechism of D Neo American HooDoo Church".

Our pens are free
   do not accept any decree accept no memos
from jack bott’d demogs who would exile our minds done tell d artist his role the demons on cultural revolution

Elsewhere Reed writes

DO YR ART D WAY U WANT
ANYWAY U WANT
ANY WANGOL U WANT
ITS UP TO YOU
WHAT WILL WORRY FOR U.

Reed's Neo-HooDoo approach to fiction emphasizes magic and power of intuition instead of rational causality, the jumbling of chronological time in the interests of reasserting the presence of the past and as a means of implying prophecy. Reed views an African-American artist as a necromancer. In an interview he says thus:

"People go into the past and get some metaphor from the past to explain the present or the future. I call this necromancy..."


21Ibid., 40.
The black writer lies in the guts of the old America making readings about the future."22

Reed is a literary necromancer, the black Shaman who conjures vital myths against the backdrop of a dead carcass of white Western aesthetics.

Reed describes himself as a jujuman incanting powerful pyrotechnique amulets called words to raise us from our cultural decadence. In an interview with John O'Brien he says thus:

"I consider myself a fetish maker. I see my books as amulets."23

In ancient African culture words were considered to have magical meanings and were considered to be charms. To Reed, an African-American artist is a maker of spells, a conjurer who works juju upon his oppressor, a witch doctor who frees his fellow victims from the psychic attacks launched by demons of the outer and inner world. Such an art is the art of bricollage, improvisational, decentred


and restricted to materials at home. Reed's Neo-HooDoo indeed resembles the native bricollage which Claude Levis Strauss describes at length in The Savage Mind. Reed is interested not in the conjuration of HooDoo but the innovative aspect of HooDoo. Reed claims to use an automatic writing which uses voices and visions brought to him from the psychic world. He conceives of his writings as wangols, spells or conjures designed to effect actual changes in the real world.

The Africans have a wider perception of Reality. They can include phenomenon from both the real world and the HooDoo tales. The so called supernatural and the Real become one, and both are real. Arthur Koestler said that strict determinism is dead in Physeis. There are other levels of reality than those we see with the eyes of common man or of a scientist. HooDoos are benders of reality and HooDoo recognizes the existence of more than one reality. Reed tries to restore the ancient HooDoo epistemology. His conception of reality is based on his HooDoo beliefs. In one of the interviews he says thus:

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“Art can reflect and create reality. It works both ways.”

Reed’s aesthetic is pure electicism guided by the spirit of VooDoo or HooDoo in which everyman and woman can be a god. This status is achieved when individuals in the world or characters in fiction learn to negotiate the perils and opportunities that occur at the intersection of subjective and objective reality.

Reed’s Neo-HooDoo is not in the manner of Blake or Yeats, a private symbology but one employing folklore roots, but an aesthetic drawn as it were from the public domain though shaped and instigated by the individual artist. It has no widening gyres or junkie codes. It can absorb all cultures and religions. In its syncretistic composition, its diversity of gods and forms of worship, its avoidance of dogmatic structures, Neo-HooDoo is Reed’s reality model, the known world forever hidden from the gaze of westerners. Its main purpose is to humble the monolithic, myopic Judeo-Christian culture and to reaffirm, instead, a plurality of cultures which would characterize more accurately the identity of America.

VooDoo is a syncretic and multicultural religion which can absorb all that is considered useful from other religions. It has syncretic flexibility. It is this concept of syncreticism that enables Reed to turn it into a literary method. The syncreticism of VooDoo makes it particularly suitable as the aesthetic framework for Reed’s multicultural stance. In an interview Reed says thus:

"VooDoo is the perfect metaphor for the multiculture".26

What he calls his Neo-HooDoo aesthetic is an understanding built syncretically upon information and belief drawn from investigation of response to a variety of cultures. It is the assertion of the black prerogative in the face of white West’s attempt to negate African-American identity. Voudoun is presented as a more than worthy antipode to Western rationalism. Reed claims to have synchronisation ability or insight into the similar forces emanating from disparate entities or media. This faculty resembles the ability long attributed to all successful artists to see the universal in the specific though Reed’s view is hardly Platonic.

Like HooDoo with its ability to absorb traditions drawn from world-wide religious practices, the novel in Reed's view must not be tied to externally imposed criteria. It need not be realistic or naturalistic. Its narrative need not be linear. It need not confine itself to one genre. As Loop Garfo Kid says:

"What if I write circuses. No one can say a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be a vaudeville show the six o'clock news the humblings of wild men saddled by demons."

Many African-American writers have used HooDoo in their works. In Chestnutt’s *Conjure Woman* or Alice Walker’s short stories HooDoo is used to solve particular problems of individuals, mostly slaves. HooDoo as a literary folklore rarely transcends the resolution of a particular problem. The concern is primarily existential and it is largely about society. Zora Neale Hurston shows concern with specific aspects of conjuration. Paule Marshall too draws upon Voudoun. Among other things, it also functions as a literary device. She uses Obeah in her work. Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* contains rites of possession, exorcism and reference to African Gods. We have Cantonese HooDoo in Louis Chu’s *Eat A Bowl of Tea* and John Wideman’s *Damballah* and *Hiding Place*.

Reed's intent differs from most black writers who use HooDoo as literary folklore. His Neo-HooDoo is more encompassing because of the attention paid to an ancient past which serves contextual purposes in its contemporary usage. Reed treats the innovative aspect of folklore as it confronts new external conditions. His use of HooDoo is dynamic for it disturbs and jostles accepted conceptions about blacks and whites. He takes his Neo-HooDoo seriously and thereby creates questions of verisimilitude that are almost non-existent in other black writers who use HooDoo.

Reed exploits HooDoo beliefs in his delineation of characters and manipulation of time and space, history and language. Reed's Neo-HooDoo jostles our conceived accepted notions about character, plot, time and space and language. His characters illustrate the results of adhering to one set or another of loas. They embody or enact the universal impulses personified by loas. In *Shrovetide in New Orleans*, Reed remarks thus:

"Though my characters are often called stereotypes their forms fall solidly within Vodoun tradition."28

Some of the characters are meant to be symbolic or emanations of HooDoo fetishes. For instance, the Haitian loa Papa Legba, synonymous with the Yoruba Orisha Eshu, a trickster figure who mediates between human and the divine realms, appears as Papa La Bas, Herman and Battr'yville, Erzulie a love-romance fetish appears as Earline in Mumbo Jumbo, the emanations of Ogun appear as Blue Coal in The Last Days of Louisiana Red and Black Peter in The Terrible Twos and The Terrible Threes. Eshu, the Black Interpreter and Yoruba god of indeterminancy and plurality of meaning, as Loop Garoo Kid in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down and as Raven Quickskill in Flight to Canada.

Many of the problems Black writers face come from the imposition of history as an enslaving force. The black writer is caught between two warring conceptions of history - the linear and the mythic. The battle over the ontological status of history threatens to entrap the Black artist in a double consciousness. Reed attempts to break through this veil by returning to the ontological status of African diasporic culture. This eternal return constitutes a mythic sense which frees Reed of the Anglo-American literary tradition. In Neo-HooDoo Manifesto Reed devises a myth that divides history into war between two churches, two communities of consciousness - "the cop
religion" of Christianity and the transformed Osirian rite VooDoo. This aspect has clearly been fictionalized in *Mumbo Jumbo* in the conflict between Wallflower Order, the official organ for the cop religion Atonist church on one hand and La Bas, the HooDoo detective on the other. For Reed, history is neither a progressive linear sequence nor a static state but the periodic recurrences of essentially identical impulses through superficially dissimilar people and events.

In Reed's novels, history is rewritten through a process called necromancy using the events in the race's past to comment on the present and prophecy about the future. In an interview with O' Brien he says:

"People go back into the past and get some metaphor from the past to explain the present or the future. I call this necromancy because that is what it is. Necromancers used to lie in the guts of the dead or in the tambs to receive visions of the future. This is prophecy. The black writer lies in the guts of the old American making readings about the future. That is what I wanted to do in *Mumbo Jumbo*."  

The Necromancers (prophet-poets) are more in the tradition of the African Grokit for they have their own view of

reality. They are the descendents of the conjure people. The novelist is also a necromancer gaining the ability to foretell the future by knowing the past. In *Mumbo Jumbo* a photograph foretells the Watergate Scandal.

Through Necromancy Reed offers an alternative view of slavery in *Flight to Canada*, of Harlem in *Mumbo Jumbo* and of sixties in America in *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*. The innovative aspect is also the function of necromancy as it asserts as an alternative view of history. This aspect also has a political reality which emerges as a set of reactions to changes in the external world. At such times it attempts to restore order by invoking the old gods/ heroes and heroines and a novel world-view which is based on the old ways of Hoodoo.

Reed's view of history as a recurrent pattern rather than a process enables him to move a character from almost any point of time or space to another. Moreover, in Voodoo the eternal loas are ever present in the world. History is always present. Gover says:

"Down the street in your neighbourhood the loa of Benjamin Franklin lives".31


Reed's historical characters are, to use his own VooDoo terminology "ZomZombies", corpses animated by a supernatural spirit who act at the magician's bidding and then return to the grave. Though they have the demonic energy and power of the tribal fetishes upon which they are modelled, they have only the most stylized connection with the real people whose name they bear. And this stylization reflects Reed's particular HooDoo concepts of character and history.

Reed's Neo-HooDooism enables him to manipulate historical time. In his discourse, the historical sense of time is not linear or diachronic as diachronicity is commonly discussed in Western terms. Reed's version of time is a circle of revolving and evolving events. Past and present are presented as though they were simultaneous. Reed's type of synchronicity takes several simultaneous events seemingly unrelated and arranges them so that later they coalesce to further the ends of the plot. In Flight to Canada the time of the novel is antebellum period. But that period overlaps with the present (1976). The characters make long-distance phone calls. Raven Quickskill travels in a jet plane. The narrator freely leap-frogs through time. Time travel and travel to unseen worlds receive their aesthetic
justification from the HooDoo notion of communication of
the human beings with the spirit world. In Yellow Back
Radio Broke Down Zuju tells Loop Garoo kid:

"... When you need more power, play poker
with the dead." 32

La Bas in Louisiana Red steps out of time to visit the
underground spirit world ruled by Blue Coal. In The
Terrible Twos St. Nicholas takes the President of United
States through Hell in an elevator.

At the centre of Reed's Neo-HooDoo aesthetic
discourse is the notion of language, its shape and
meaning. He extends the notion of syncreticism into the
level and texture of language he uses, thus creating a
kind of contemporary bathetic language whose principal
rules of discourse are taken from the streets, popular
music and television. By purposely mixing the myriad
aspects of language from different sources in popular
culture, he pulls into cardinal function words and
expressions which create the fictive illusion of real
speech. Reed sharpens the subversion with his free use of
the vocabularies of HooDoo and Jazz improvisation. These
vocabularies are basic to the speech of Reed's

protagonist. This can be clearly noticed in the linguistic invention of Bukka Doopeyduk in The Free-lance Pallbearers. Doopeyduk frequently transforms linguistic meaning into music. He characterizes New York as an O-bob-she-bang-a-klong-a-long-a ding-dong-art-of-sight-not-to-be.

The power of HooDoo enables the black to preserve his ethnic identity instead of being assimilated into the mainstream culture and gives a distinct black identity. Thus Neo-HooDoo serves a dual purpose in Reed's works. It enables him not only to free himself from the stronghold of Western literary conventions but also to affirm his black identity and culture which insists on improvisation, innovation, creativity, originality, artistic freedom and power of intuition. Many White critics and black critics adversely reacted to Reed's Neo-HooDooism. For instance, Howe defames Reed's method as "commercial Cooings" and Amiri Baraka decries it as "spurious".


Critics such as Robert Elliot Fox\textsuperscript{35} and W.C. Bamberger\textsuperscript{36} criticise Reed of exposing Neo-HooDoo as a theory and his failure to integrate it in the narrative. They allege that Reed's attempt to promote Neo-HooDoo obstructed his creative process and in his use of Neo-HooDoo there is a danger of his writing being "repetitive and rhetorical". Neil Schmitz remarks that though Neo-HooDoo provides Reed with a coherent mythos, it deflects the cause of satire.\textsuperscript{37} In Reed, at times, the satirist and the myth-maker seem to be at odds.

Neo-HooDoo is the salvation of both traditional HooDoo and Christianity, of African diasporic culture and Western culture. It will provide both cultures with a viable way of reconciling the struggle between dogmaticism and myth. And it will provide the Black artist with the vehicle to merge art with politics without compromising either. Neo-HooDoo would mediate between Bo Shammo and...


\textsuperscript{36}W.C. Bamberger, "The Waxing and Wanning of Cab Calloway", \textit{Review of Contemporary Fiction} 4.2 (Summer 1984) 204.

social-realist who insists that art should have social purpose and Loop Garoo who insists that a novel can be anything it wants to be. It can provide the Black artist with a literary tradition which acknowledges both his African and American heritage without negating either. Reed's Neo-HooDooism moves finally along the same metafictive angle that Pynchon and Barthelme take in their fiction probing folklore and myth with the same seriocomic intent to wrench from them their own truths. What distinguishes Reed's Neo-HooDoo is his adamant optimism, his belief that print and words are not dead at all.