Ishmael Reed's second novel *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* elucidates the racial conflict and the oligarchial problems of a small town in the old West. It constitutes Reed's attempt to reconstruct a coherent pattern and viable form after the necessary wreckage of his first novel *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*. Reed in one of his interviews says thus:

"I think that with *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* I did make an attempt to communicate more than with *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*."

Though it is set in the old West, it reflects the psychedelic culture and youth rebellion of the sixties in America. Amalgamating the cliches of the Western speech and dramatic situation with black jive, Reed allegorizes the struggle between Black Osiris and Set portrayed as the Loop Garoo Kid—the representative of African traditional culture and Voodoo power and Drag Gibson representing the White Establishment and Judeo-Christian culture. Reed in one of his interviews says thus:

*Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* is really an artistic guerilla warfare against the Historical Establishment.

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2 Ibid., 179.
Reed here reworks the themes he developed in his poem "I am a cowboy in the Boat of Ra"—hypocrisy of the American church, Blackwoman's emasculation of the Black male, warping of history to confuse and degrade the blackman, image of blackman as evil and open attempts of the Whiteman to kill off the Blackman.

Reed employs the experimental epistemology of the African-American folklore heritage in combination with the psychotic semantic categories of the West to achieve a highly original, secular and existential portrait of what is happening in America and what happened in the past. It is not merely a satire on the old West with a black cowboy as a hero. It is not merely a parable about contemporary black struggle against the white establishment. It is not merely a parody of the annexation fight between the Union and the territory of Texas. It is essentially Reed's fullest expression of the Neo-Hoodoo aesthetic. We have here another version of the myth of the exotic primitive in touch with some rich unrecognized current of life. It encloses wild lyricism within an appropriate organic and facilitating form. It is a modern Hoodoo Western.

Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is Reed's completely native form which combines Negro conjurism with an
American cowboy story. The result is much like Donald Barthelmé's deft fracturing of familiar forms. The protagonist of the narrative, Loop Garvo Kid, claims that he is engaged in the creation of a horse-opera which is what Reed's second novel is, on two different levels. First, there is the traditional sense of a Western the popular genre of both fiction and film. However, there is also another important meaning for a horse in VooDoo. It means one who becomes possessed by a deity or loa in African VooDoo. So what we really have here is a Hoodoo Western.

In *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* Reed critiques both realism and modernism. At several points in the novel, Reed deliberately reflects upon the history of the black tradition. For the core of his narrative he borrows almost intact the sociological drama Norman Mailer describes in *The White Negro*—that migration of white middle-class youth in revolt against the values of their own culture, toward the counter culture of Black America and woven into this phenomenon a barely disguised account of the student uprisings at Berkeley and other campuses.

Reed is also aware of the African-American tradition in which he has been working. In one of the interviews he says thus:
"I think the themes I deal with in the novels have been dealt with before by black novelists all the way back 1854. I can see similarities between what I have done in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down and certain things Wells Brown used in his play The Escape or A Leap for Freedom".3

Reed tries to appropriate a spirit and a certain form characteristic of Charles Chestnutt’s Conjure Woman in which the traditional frame-tale is used to structure the novel. He borrows techniques from the black oral tradition, the interlocutor and endman dialogues of Vaudeville, the abrupt scene-shifts, timing and symbolism of Western movie, radio and TV scripts and the loose episodic structure of picaresque novels.

At one level, as the title of the novel suggests, Reed draws on the once popular nineteenth century lurid sensational ‘Yellow kivered’ books produced mainly by Eastern dudes for Western frontierism. On another level he had adopted the modern black oral toast to create a black cowboy tall tale, a long oral narratives of the amazing supernatural feats of amoral badman. Its characters are non-realistic types and caricatures.

3Ibid., p.182
Yellow Back Radio Broke Down looks at the historical roots of control. Kathryne Hume remarks that it interprets the cowboy myths of taming the American west as grotesque and perverse cultural rape. Reed also challenges Christianity as a form of control by putting the Pope against his HooDoo protagonist the Loop Garoo Kid. The cultural intolerance derived from Christianity and the contempt for those with less sophisticated technology and therefore less fire-power are both important targets in this mock Western. Reed aims at the reinstallation of the Judeo-Christian tradition into the wider contexts of earth goddess cults, depicting Christianity as an outgrowth of a pseudo-rationalization of authentic primitive faiths. This idea Reed develops more fully in his succeeding novel Mumbo Jumbo.

The novel has three epigrams, one from William S. Hart, another from some one named Henry Allen and the third from "The Rustler", an American Cowboy song. Among the epigrams we find references to the mythical Western hero, race and HooDoo - a strange combination. In the very opening lines of the novel, there is a strange combination of folksy tone with a touch of allusiveness.

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that is both learned and pop, parody, puns, wit and cliches. There is also a foreshadowing that the Loop Garoo Kid would make the Pope cry and Drag Gibson's head would be shed to the executioner's swine.

A desperado so onery he made the Pope Cry and the most powerful of cattlemen shed his head to the Executioner's swine.  

Michael Fabre remarks thus "In the place of traditional oppositional races, an opposition of cultures is substituted". The sophisticated civilization of the Reds and the vital forces of the blacks are vindicated against the acquisitiveness of the whites.

The three major characters - Chief Showcase, the Red Indian, Drag Gibson, the white rancher and the Loop Garoo Kid, the black cowboy and the lesser characters who side with each of them - all can be analysed as embodiments of opposed or complimentary principles in this - what Michael Fabre calls "chrestomachy", which as the narrative develops can be read as a triumph of soul (Black) over


materialism (White) which had overpowered the spirit (Red). 7

Without this oppositional mythical complementarity in which the conflict between diverse avatars of the static and the dynamic, of good and evil functions the whole narrative would be reduced to a comic strip a cleanly structured but one-dimensional series of syntagmatic sequences proliferating in all spatio temporal directions but devoid of paradigmatic depth. In fact, the success of Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is due to the ability of Reed's fiction to reach beyond thematic development and manichestic chrestomachy not so much in the direction of parallel fantasies as towards the deeper areas of subconscious imagination, to fly up in order reconcile our dreams and our faiths.

In later novels such as Mumbo Jumbo and Flight to Canada, Reed makes a more refined use respectively of the antithetical cultures as expressed in gang warfare and of the interplay between history and fiction and the continuing racial and Civil War in the South. In these two novels, he exploits each direction more fully, and

7Ibid., 172.
Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is a novel about Neo-HooDooism. Every explanation, every concealed footnote betrays the artifice of the myth. Reed's mythopoeic lore is as arcane as the cryptic references streaming about in William Burrough's fiction. Neil Schnitaz remarks thus:

"The problem in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is to translate VooDoo into a singular way of writing to dislodge it from its status as a cultural myth and make it a state of consciousness." 9

Syncreticism and synchronity along with the other facets of the transfiguration of VooDoo as living method appear for the first time in the novel. In order to get away from the conventions of Western fiction and "to return to dark heathenism", Reed puts Neo-HooDooism to the forefront. Reed defines Neo-HooDoo thus:

"One has to return to what some writers would call dark heathenism, to find original tall tales and yarns with the kind of originality that some writers used as found 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 Julie Jackson a New Orleans Soothsayer, when asked the origins of the amulets tailsmans, charms and potions in her worship to say "I make all my stuff. If saves me money and it is good. People who has to buy their stuff ain't using their heads." 10

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In brief, this is the significance of Neo-HooDooism as an experimental mode, the concept that informs the novel. Reed defines the African American artist as similar to Necromancer, a word whose etymology is "revealing in self". He is a conjurer who works JuJu upon his oppressors/a witch doctor who frees his fellow victims from the psychic attack launched by demons of the outer and inner world. Such an artist is improvisational, decentred and restricted to materials on hand. It is this fluent state of mind that enables the Loop to confound so easily the snares set for him in Drag's American West. In the "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" Reed devises a myth that divides history into a war between two churches two communities of consciousness—the cop religion of Christianity represented in the novel by Drag Gibson and the transformed Osirian rite VooDoo embodied in the Loop. Reed says thus:

Neo-HooDoo are detectives of the metaphysical about to make a pinch. We have issued warrants for a god arrest."11

The Loop is precisely that hero, the comic apostle of liberating heresies. Just as sexual frankness both in action and description is part of HooDoo ritual, so too is

sexual frankness an intricate part of the novel. The Loop insults Drag by making love to Drag's mail-order bride Mustache Sal. Often, Reed resorts to description of graphic sexual intercourse rhetorically. The novel opens with a description of a fetish. The Loop Garoo Kid whose name means "change into" is a Hoodoo fetish.

The structure of the novel both on the spatial/temporal and the metaphysical levels represents a major innovation from his first novel The Free-Lance Pallbearers which is only a satire on America. Michael Fabre remarks thus:

"Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is to be decoded simultaneously on several wave lengths which range from B.C. to the present and pertain to a variety of modes from carnival to morality play".12

The erudition and innovation of the novel are most fascinatingly displayed in the multilevelled discontinuous episodic time structure Reed employs to roam at will through history, parodying popular Westerns and demythologizing the American frontier. It ranges over at least three telescoping centuries and the whole of the

North American scene, even drawing upon ancient European and African religions in order to portray the conflict as the mere avatar of long standing cultural warfare. Anomalies, incongruities and anachronisms are used for comic effect as radio, TV, ray guns, airplanes and computerized buses appear in the same frame as Thomas Jefferson, Doc John and John Wesley Hardin appear.

James R. Lindroth observes that it is through Zozo Labrique that Reed carries the aesthetic discourse further for he relates through her the black aesthetic imagination to the Hoodoo spirit world. Zozo’s dying words to the Loop invokes the unseen spirits from where the Hoodoo artist draws his power. She tells him “not to forget the wangols, the mojo and the gris” she has taught him and then says thus:

When you need more power play poker with the Head”. In pointing the artist to the world of the dead, Zozo enumerates an aesthetic principle which assumes major importance in Reed’s fiction - the artist’s free


manipulation of historical time. What the mundanist aesthetician would criticize as the anachronisms of a careless artist, Reed through his appeal to HooDoo raises to the level of artistic principle justifying the bridging of synchronous time planes. The narrator freely leaps through time drawing his insights from wherever his creative impulse leads. The widening of the space and time categories in the novel which generally expands the scope of the plot as cosmic drama closely corresponds to the development of the part played by VooDoo.

Reed goes farther than the immediate American past in his historical sources. The ancient Athenian Statesman Alcibiades who betrayed his own city in the crucial hour lends his name to one of Loop's fellow artists who betrays him to Drag. This and similar historical parallels suggest Reed's consciousness of the contemporaniety of earlier events or in T.S. Eliot's words "a perception not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence". And in the process of demonstrating this phenomenon, Reed juxtaposes artifacts from separate periods eliminating the artificial division of time.

In this technique Reed approximates the devices of the Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola whose Palmwine Drinkard
represents the epitome of this approach. Using altered syntax and the juxtaposition of incomparable images, Tutuola's novel symbolizes the rupture of one civilisation's cultural continuum by the incursion of another and the very real inconsistencies. Whereas Tutuola's images are of telephone, ringing in the dense silence of the forest, by the presence of petrol cans, in the jungle, Reed offers such images as a giant can of DDT or a helicopter flying over the treacherously wild western desert or a closed circuit TV in Gibson's house or on the other hand giving his hero attributes of figures from the past as well as the present. For historically Loop might be easily identified as Deadwood Dick in Net Love the famous cowboy of the late 1800s.

Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is a horse opera taken to its logical extremes. So it abolishes space and time conventions as well as linguistic ones. He freely mixes centuries of superimposed settings. Thus gigantic prehistoric sleuths co-exist with futuristic technology, Germans with the Red Indians, Revolutionary War Generals with late nineteenth century cowboys, fiery dragons with the Pope, Loop rescued by a group of Amazons from being beheaded on the day when annexation of Texas is decreed with the Seven Cities of Cibola looming on the horizon.
Characters allude simultaneously to the guillotine as "a device from the recent 1789 French Revolution to the crooks making American graves at Omaha Beach".

Like time, space too is distorted and becomes distanced. The American East and West coalesce. Fiction itself can jump unexpectedly ahead and reverse and backtrack in low gear or take off for the heavens like Showcase’s Bush Beeve Monster or the Pope’s ship.

The time is ostensibly the nineteenth century but it is more properly, a segment of time set adrift like an immense iceberg in the ocean of history which includes the past, the present and the future. Encased in this ice reflected through many facets as in a well-cut gem is a critical moment, a bit of psychic germplasm of broad significance to the American character. Reed’s strategy is to isolate and dramatize this particular nexus and then to bring into contact with other mythi-historical confluences allowing them to resonate together with resultant vibrations that should tune the reader. In an interview Reed says about his conception of time thus:

"The time sense is akin to the time one finds in the psychic world where past, present and future exist simultaneously." 15

In one of the interviews Reed gives insight into the variety of sources and complexity of associations of the novel. He says thus:

"The title Yellow Back Radio Broke Down was based upon a poem by Lorenzo Thomas called "Modern Plumbing Illustrated" which was published in a magazine called East Side Review (1966) which lasted one issue. I based the book on old radio script in which the listener constructed the sets from his imagination. That's way radio also because it's an oral book, "a talking book". People say they read aloud, that is it speaks through them which makes it a loa. Also radio, because there is more dialogue than scenery and description. Yellow Back because that's what they used to call old west backs about cow boy heroes. They are yellow covered books and were usually lurid and sensational and so the lurid scenes are in the book because that is what the form calls for. They are not there to shock. "Broke Down" is a take-off on Lorenzo Thomas' "Plumbing Illustrated". When people say break it down they mean to strip something down to its basic components. So Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is the dismantling of a genre done in an oral way.

The last remark points to the novelty of Reed's attempt in his second novel at dismantling of a genre. Fiction stripped of its defenses, with its back to the wall is thus dismantled, reduced from a complete whole to the sum total of its discrete elements. Reed undertakes to break things down to slow the narrative movement in

\[16 \text{Ibid., 125.}\]
order to designate its processes and to catalogue the elements and conventions of which he makes use, not without derision. Michael Fabre remarks thus:

"From paranoid, Reed's style becomes schizoid in the disjunctive mode of Nathanel West whom he admires."1

The novel thus owes much to comic strips not only because each sequence can work forward and backward in time and space but also because even the typographical arrangement juxtaposes description and dialogue in blocks separated by wide blanks. *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* is visually characterized by its discontinuity, the basic elements being rather long sentences remarkable for their lack of relief; each character speaks his lines, then is silent, seldom angry or excited enough to shout in capitals. Each narrative block seems to repudiate narration in order to become a set of stage directions rather than a description. In brief, the novel functions as a film script.

Stripped down to such minimalness, fiction is offered almost defenceless to the reader's manipulating appetites.

He can slow down or speed up its course which implies an increased participation on his part. This is a characteristic of what Reed calls "an oral book, a talking book". For Reed the spirit which moves the participant in a Voodoo ceremony is synonymous with inspiration and he speaks of his works as being dictated to him by the loas. Here voice alone can animate what would otherwise remain a flat comic strip. Reed’s narrative strategy is programatic and invites the reader to leave things in the narrator’s hands or rather in his mouth. When read aloud, the narrative is sustained and given credibility by the narrator/reader, whose audience is much wider than the part of himself which listens to him reading. The reader becomes actor/narrator while remaining necessarily part of the audience. As an accomplice vindicating the tall-tale and a do-it-yourself maker of fiction from the separate parts of the broke down fictional kit, the reader refers to the directions for use provided by the author and adopts the latter’s perspectives concerning genre and form even when disagreeing with his ideological outlook. Thus Reed’s narrative assigns a greater role for the reader in recreating the test from the broken components.

Yellow Back Radio Broke Down Reed alludes to texts and books developing a net work of intertextuality in order
to confront his aesthetic with conflicting stance and to clearly differentiate himself from other schools. All this takes place within the very genre of the comic strip Western which sets up character, background and scene according to their appropriate canonic functions and status. Keith E. Byerman remarks thus:

"The concerns of Yellow Back Radio Broke Down reflect the basic theme of Reed's entire cannon; the relationship of art and ideology."

The Western genre with its lone hero defending freedom, justice and goodness against forces of corruption and evil becomes a vehicle for examining the society's commitment to principle. But in the process of breaking the form down to its components the author exposes an underlying aesthetic and cultural totalitarianism and thereby breaks up the form altogether.

Deconstruction of the novel as a genre is the heart and soul of African-American writing. Theo D'haen remarks that the typical strategy of the post-modern Western is to invoke and then negate the conventions of the genre. 19


Yellow Back Radio Broke Down there is a deconstruction of the genre, the Western that is the postmodern negation of the centredness and reassurance, typical of the genre. Reed seeks a non-logo-centric and non-phonocentric text, a text whose meaning is not in itself but in its ability to call forth that which is not present. Brautigan in Hawkline Monster exploits a number of extraneous paraphernalia to generate in his reader the expectation that he is going to read a true Western only in order to be able to twist the conventions he has emphasized. The Post-Modern Western, in general, plays on the character, plot and setting-conventions ruling the tradition. They partly invert these conventions. They bring out the emptiness and the very conventionality of the conventions they evoked. Christine Brooke Rose remarks that Reed's Yellow Back Radio Broke Down is a strongly stylized send up of the Wild West to the point of parody in Mikhil Bakti's sense of an orientation diametrically opposed to the model.20

In his second novel Reed parodies the conventional sub-literary genre, the American Western, to further his development of the aesthetic of Neo-HooDooism. It

The document continues as follows:

point to the other elements that he introduces in the novel. Robert Murry Davies remarks thus:

"Reed works best where he has a firm structure like the Western against which he can play variations". 22

The complementary interaction between the underlying received structure and the writer's inventiveness gives force to the work.

Joe Weixlmann remarks that Reed in an act of complex signification inverts thematic patterns of traditional western, toys with the form of the subgenre the Western and exposes the vast assumptions of Western civilization of which the novel itself is very much a part. 23 For Reed, the very sub genre, the Western, with its fantasy, surrealism and myth serves as a critique of modernism and realism, a signification of realistic tradition.

Reed's Yellow Back Radio Broke Down has all the cliches of the traditional Western—Drag Gibson getting a mail order bride, his spying of his cowpokes through closed circuit TV, Loop Garoo Kid thrashing the Marshal


with bull whip flickring off his hat and badges. Here we have the frontier life, the conquest of open lands, wagon trains, powerful and boisterous cowboys, cattle migrating along the Chisholm Trail, shotgun towns, outlaws and their saloons. As in the typical Western the town people of Yellow Back Radio are typically faceless, confounded and bland—only three are mentioned—the Marshall, the Preacher and Big Lizzy.

The protagonist of the novel, Loop Garoo Kid himself, is a black cowboy version of High John the conqueror or Bully Kit, the conventional hero in the Western. He uses the HooDoo ingredients—his Phallic Whip, ruby eyed snake in addition to the shells, the mad dog's teeth in the chain he wears around his neck, the charms he casts in his cave and the elaborate HooDoo rituals he performs invoking the VooDoo Loa Legba. The very opening of the narrative, "Folks, this is the story of the Loop Garoo Kid," (p. 1) sets the tone of the genre the Western he follows and parodies. It is the colloquial narrative style of a tall tale or oral form of literature rather than the tone of the traditional Western novel. The novel has set antagonist parties—the black cowboy Loop Garoo Kid and the white rancher Dr. Gibson. True to the conventional Western, Reed's novel has revenge as the main motif.
Robert Murry Davies remarks that with minor exceptions *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* follows the pattern of the revenge motif of a thousand Westerns.\(^\text{24}\)

The genre's traditional assumptions are inverted as the demonic, anarchic cowboy Loop Garoo Kid must combat the repression and corruption of the very forces of law and order here represented by the white rancher \(\text{rag}\) Gibson. In a system where law and order are equated with repression and corruption the good cowboy must be presented \(\text{anarchic and demonic.}\) Thus, the dualistic formula of the Western with its clearly defined categories of good and evil breaks down into something more closely resembling a dialectic in which good and evil are defined historically and functionally rather than absolutely. Moreover, the chronological cause and effect design of the genre cannot be applied since the dismantling makes clear the arbitrary nature of the form. Without fixed relations of strong elements based on fixed ideological assumptions "anything" becomes possible. Reed makes his aesthetic position clear when Loop, while confronting Bo Shmo the social-realist, says thus:

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"What's your beef with me Bo Shmo what if I write circuses. No one says a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be a vaudeville show, the six o'clock news, the mumblings of wildmen saddled by demons." 25

Reed's parody of the Western in *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* is ideologically loaded. The protagonist Loop is both ironically a black cowboy hero and a parody of the Haitian Congo spirit Bacco Lamp Geron. The genre's traditional assumptions of the long (good hero) is inverted, as the demonic anarchic cowboy must combat the repression and corruption of the very forces of the law and order represented here by the White rancher Drag Gibson. Byerman remarks thus:

"Reed has simply reversed the pattern of good and evil, black and white in this novel". 26

Loop fits into the model of the African-American folk badman. He was a pimp before joining the circus. He enjoys humiliating his opponents. He represents all that is destructive of the existing moral, political religious and social order. Moreover, he exposes the manipulative and exploitative motives of those who challenge the dominant ideology with a system of their own. From a cave


in the hills, he fights Gibson's technology, his political power with HooDoo spells and charms. The phallic whip and his ruby-eyed snake are his weapons. By his HooDoo magic, he casts spells which cause Drag's cattle to die, crops wither away and fish ponds go dry. Even John Wesley Harden proves to be ineffectual before Loop's HooDoo power. The morality play of the conventional western which pits the forces of law and order against the space of the nomadic is thus subverted and transformed.

In a conventional western we have at the climax of the narrative, violence, bloodshed and gunfire exchange. But in Reed's novel at the climax Drag Gibson invites the Pope to come to Yellow Back Radio to subdue the rebellious cowboy Loop. Instead of a shoot out or gunswing we have here a long debate between the Pope and Loop which is, as Byerman calls, 'a parody of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor'. The debate makes it clear that Loop himself is a son of God, the satanic one cast out of Heaven. Here Reed inverts the whole western aesthetic tradition. Art and imagination are not the expression of order and standards but the subversion of them. Reed also parodies the Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse in his

27 Ibid., 224.
portrayal of the Barber, Marshal and Doctor—all criminals and hypocrites. Loop’s betrayal by his own fellowmen Alcibides and Jeff is a parody of His Passion.

It is commonplace in the discussion of the Western to point out that hero in saving society creates a world in which his values are obsolete or irrelevant. However, in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down, Loop has not helped to impose the rule of law against tyranny or anarchy. He has little concern for the townspeople to be a populist force. In the final inversion of the Western format, Loop can be seen at the close of the narrative riding into the sunset not away from love and affirmation of patriarchal order but toward the beloved and creative anarchy of the blues relationships, while Satanic, erotic, expressive force leaves the world history to become an eternal principle.

Loop, like his creator and unlike the modern characters, does not simply inhabit a myth. He appropriates it. As an artist, a conjurer, an actor, he uses the myth not simply to keep things moving like the doctor in John Barth’s The End of the Road through mythotherapy nor like Ellison’s or Joyce’s artist to extinguish himself but to participate, improvise, liberate
through the force of imagination. Reed distrusts the
authority of his own chosen myths. The myth of the horse
opera is not properly enforced or recapitulated in its
entirety. Loop can offer no model to the people of the
West except that of independence from all forms and
continuous and spontaneous creation of new ones. Reed
denies the shaping and enforcing power of myth. It is
possible for him to use a myth and at the same time not to
be bound by and to it. On the other hand, he loosens the
bonds and plays with them.

Scenes within the narrative are separated by two
adjacent circles—one filled with black, and the other all
white. More than mere scene dividers, these paired circles
(0, 0) whose origin may be traced to Voudon and Umbanda
clearly permit black to become the powerful element in the
design. The darkened circle comes first and is to be
figured as a presence. White, figured dominantly in Euro-
American literature as presence, becomes the second
element and an absence. Less polemically, the circles as
Robert Elliot Fox has pointed out serve as a metaphor for
the essential duality of existence which Voudon images in
its Rada (Right Hand) and Petro (Left Hand) rites.¹⁸ Like

¹⁸Robert Elliot Fox, "Blackening the zero toward a
Semiotics of Neo-Hoodoo," Black American Literature Form
18(3) Fall (1984).
the Taoist Yinyang that appears in *Mumbo Jumbo* (p.166) or the 'Ve Ve' design on the book covers the paired circles connote life's multiplicity. W.C. Bamberger remarks that the dots are perhaps meant to suggest the extremes of the moon or the darkness and then renewed light between acts and scenes in a play or film. Reed uses these dots in his poem "Cab Calloway on the Boat of Ra".

The episode in which Chief Showcase rescues Loop from Bo Shmo serves as a platform for Reed to present his aesthetic stand. In this crucial encounter between the Loop, an outlaw artist and Bo Shmo, the Social-realist-aesthete who represents the literal-minded approach to art, there is an exchange of words rather than bullets as in a traditional Western. Bo Shmo promulgates an aesthetic doctrine that all art must be for the end of liberating the masses. He launches attacks on non-conformists like Loop. His literary speciality is those suffering books he writes about his neighbours. He declares all art must be for the end of liberating masses. Bo Shmo and his gang are the representatives of the group who attempt to dictate terms to the artist to conform

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himself to certain criteria. His position is essentially one promulgated in Le Roi Jones' famous poem "Black Art" as he proclaims that a landscape is only valuable if it depicts the oppressor hanging from a tree.

The criticism levelled at Loop by Bo Shmo interestingly recalls the criticism that is heaped on Reed's first fictional attempt by a number of critics. Loop rejects Bo Shmo's ideas and defends himself not with bullets but with words which form a major theme of the aesthetic discourse running through Reed's fiction. Loop says thus:

"What's your beef with me Bo Shmo what if I write circuses? No one says a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be, a vaudeville show, the six o'clock news, the mumblings of wild men saddled by demons."30

Loop challenges Bo Shmo's denying the artist his freedom to create popular art of bright colours, hold characters and low humour combined in a wild mix of factual and visionary. His assertion that a novel can be "anything" is rhetorically effective in its appeal to aesthetic openness beyond the narrow limits of social realism. That 'anything' for Reed is also the reconstruc-

tion of the formula through the narration of its deconstruction into a new kind of fiction—the HooDoo western. Essential to this reformation is its oral character, thus the emphasis on radio.

James R. Lindroth observes that Reed explores the aesthetic issue of realistic mimeses through the verbal conflict of Loop and Bo Shmo.\(^1\) It resembles the exchange of words between Offisa Pup on one hand and Krantz Kat and Ignatz on the other in Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*. Loop and his creator Reed cannot tolerate these prescriptive demands which amount to what Robert Elliot Fox calls "straight-jacketing the imagination in the name of revolutionary necessity".\(^2\) Here Reed defends himself against the Black Aesthetic critics such as Addison Gayle, and Irving Howe, the followers of the Black Arts Movement, who say that black experience is uniform and blacks have only one language—that is liberation.

\(^1\) James R. Lindroth, "From Krazy Kat to HooDoo Aesthetic Discourse in the Fiction of Ishmael Reed," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 4(2) Summer 1984; 233.

Loop’s assertion is a fair description of Reed’s fiction and the novel’s declaration of independence, its author and the autonomy it is gifted with. This is a distinctly postmodernist position. Byerman remarks thus:

“This freedom and versatality are both the form and content of Yellow Back Radio Broke Down.”

It also throws light on Reed’s refusal to follow the formula of the yellow backs or the conventional assumptions about representation of space and time in the novel.

Reed aims at repudiating the sort of mimetic fiction which has been revered by the great tradition. This is expressed by the cultural revolution of the Flower Power Children who have driven the adults out of town.

“We decided to create our own fiction.”

Jack the Barker refers to the Seven Cities of Cibola which significantly symbolizes not the El Dorado of wealth but a magnificent legendary American paradise “where men could be free to dream” (p.24).


Traditional aesthetics are expressed in the grandshow of Crucifixion which Loop believes exploits gaudy effects like striking deus-ex-machina, lightning and thunder techniques on Golgotha. When he envisions his captive and possible martyrdom, Loop does not want to get up his own happening as Pope Innocent accuses but to emphasize through the parody the emptiness of Christian ritual.

Michael Fabre remarks that Reed's fiction is endowed with the power of self-generating and gives precedence to comedy and dreams. It takes off on the least suggestion or challenge from pseudo realism. A fine example can be found in Chapter III where Loop's elaborate do-it-yourself VooDoo ceremony aimed at providing the Avenger with a panoply of spells to be unleashed against the villain is described. A violent outbreak against cattlemen occurs:

The Germans attacked the next day. There had always been skirmishes to the north between these dauntless hearty warriors and the cattlemen who taxed them heavily.

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rode off with their women, rustled their cattle, stole their best grazing areas and burned their corn.  

The fictional challenge becomes compounded as violence increases and one fears that the villains, Drag included, will be slain bringing the novel to a premature end. The battle scene stops abruptly as being defined by a story within a story, the significance of which appears to lie less in the tale itself than its telling:

The warriors obediently walked over the horse's stall and were about to chop off its head when it awoke wringing wet and snorting from the affects of its recurring nightmare.  

This episode now defines itself as a dream. Fiction thus explicitly appears to be a narration of tales which repudiates the claim for its truth or verisimilitude. This fictional episode clearly picks up the gauntlet thrown by Bo Shámo but it disproves the convention of the nationalists and law-givers who asserted that the anarcho technological paradise The Seven Cities of Cibola—was no more real than a green horse's nightmare.

From a current metaphor here, taken literally, a fictional episode has sprung. One could even say that Gibson's green horse has a nightmare in the novel because a linguistic expression had challenged the possibility of such an occurrence. Likewise the German raid on Drag's farm occurs because Bo Shmo earlier in the novel had accused Loop in an aesthetic exchange of being unable to create the difference between a dream and reality. At the same time the reality of fiction as such is vindicated since there does not indeed exist little discernible difference between the two groups in the attack-episode and since the attack itself has just as much reality as the ugly dream of fictional green horse although this nightmare has been motivated in the plot by Loop's casting spells upon the ranch. In this perspective the reader must be ready to consider that any potentiality enunciated in the narration, be it on a trite linguistic or purely metaphorical level, can be realized later in the novel. For an instance, we hear that Gibson keeps Chief Showcase around "in case the Pope wants to visit or something" (p.126).

This is not just a figure of speech. Sure enough the Pope will actually pay a visit to Drag. This does not mean that anything can happen, rather than eventuality,
evoked by the narrative, can only become actualized according to certain rules which contain the genre of the broke down. References to other literary or narrative genres are quite frequent in the novel. This is to emphasize less the fictive character of artistic expression than the fact that it should not attempt reflection or mimesis. The narrator comments on the desert episode.

Loop Garoo had to shoot his hoss. He hated to do it but under the circumstances it turned out to be the wisest thing he could do; the horse was a snafu anyway. One of Drag Gibson's gunmen had wounded the animal in the leg.  

Each character knows the limits of his role and the rules of the genre with the result that telescoping narrative circles not only produce comedy but question the rules which hereto prevailed. When left alone, a character acts and thinks according to the requirements of his role, a given situation according to the genre. Thus Drag ponders over marital problems.

38Ibid., 34.
Just suppose that the Loop Garro Kid managed to get through all the tests wanting for him between Yellow Back Radio and the town lying fifty miles away from here. He will come after me. You know the revenge motif ... and nickelodeon for the worms.\textsuperscript{39}

He is contemplating of getting rid of his wife.

"It was like a monster flickah draromer - the confrontation. Horrible hybrid meets spooky situation. Horrible hybrid was dripping wet."\textsuperscript{40}

Or upon hearing Showcase's helicopter in the desert Bo Shmo exclaims.

"Gads!", Bo Shmo said, "the arch-nemesis of Villians like me. The Flying Brush Beeve Monster. Let's go out of here."\textsuperscript{41}

Here the character remains a prisoner of the definition imposed upon him by fiction and of the part he is cast in.

The Villains perform accordingly just as the Banker and the Sheriff fulfill their social roles in the turn. Conversely the good characters, the positive protagonists are defined by their capacity for change for conceiving

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, 47.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, 49.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, 37.
other shapes and assuming several roles. Crossing the boundaries and limits of the genre Loop finds no difficulty in turning to another narrative type in order to describe his situation.

"Not only he be a desert carrion but now something right out of Science fiction was descending upon him from the heavens Loop thought". 42

As a consequence the character/role tends to be petrified in stereotyped discourse whereas the protagonist/author generates dynamic and eclectic fiction.

Yellow Back Radio Broke Down Reed playfully stretches language to the limits of meaning while pursuing an aesthetic discourse that is at once an attack on realistic poesis and a defense of what he has come to call the art of HooDoo. Jerome Klinkowitz remarks that Reed’s aim is less to tell a story than create a new form of language from which the elements of narrative may be derived. 43

Beyond this self-consciousness of language lies the fiction-making impulse itself. Although the pace of the action is not quick, the allusions and puns come fast.

42 Ibid., 37.
The quality ranges very sharply from witty comments to just plain sophomoric jokes.

Reed's discourse in the novel curves in and around Black English which serves him as a different stylistic device not as language. It is, withal, a learned and allusive discourse as mixed in its diction as Mark Twain's. Reed is driven to William Burroughs' for an anti-English as Aime Cesaire was driven to Andre Breton to write anti-French. The action of the novel is narrated in a racy Western vernacular and brief paragraphs with spaces in between like separate film shots. The blending of imagination and fact does not so much tell a story rather generate a language. Because the components of Reed's novel are anti-illusionistic, the action takes place in the language of narration.

Ronald E. Bush remarks that Reed in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down attempts to approximate a spirit and a certain form characteristic of Charles Chestnutt. Just as

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Chestnutt in *Conjure Women* uses the form of the traditional frame-tale to structure his novel that is almost completely related to African-American directly. Reed combines the qualities of African-American dialect and slang and Western jargon and while in the process of raising the former to the level of literary language, he intensifies the poetic nature of his prose.

Reed's desire to explore the African-American tradition as well as his act of rebellion is reflected in the language he employs. An intriguing and complex combination of Western jargon and Black American usage the language of the fictional world is interesting for the comic effect it achieves. In repeatedly using unorthodox spelling, Reed creates not only greater rhymic and poetic force in his works but maintains a kind of linguistic consistency which often forces us to question the value and logicality of standard American English. For instance Reed uses "nekkid" for naked, "hoss" for horse, "furrinier" for foreigner. His unorthodox language derives from Afro-American slang a great many terms.

The novel's first line "Folks Here is the story of Loop Garoo Kid" (p.1) introduces within its language the three levels of anachronistic mixture combining wild West
with Voodoo and modern technology. The tone of this speech is pre-eminently American. It is the language of the Western. It is the colloquial style of a tall tale or oral form of literature. It is the grandaddy or radio soap opera, an oral form and the ancestor of the visual mystification of television and cinema.

Michael Fabre remarks that at the centre of Reed's aesthetic discourse is the notion of language, its shape and its meaning. Moving beyond the notion of the green horse as nightmarish to the notion of a horse whose psychic life produces nightmares, Reed continues his rapid improvisation with meaning by turning out the green horse into a standard form to judge the narrow limits of the concretist's imaginative life as propounded in Bo Shmo's idea of a novel. Jake, the Barker, one of the circus artists, presents the green horse's nightmare as an aesthetic standard in his derogation of the concretist's rejection of the possibility of Utopian places such as the Seven Cities of Cibola. "Such an anarchotechnical paradise is as real as a green horse's nightmare" (p.24).
To the concretists such as Bo Shmo who adore facts, neither green horse nor the Seven Cities of Cibola have any reality. From the aesthetically free standpoint of the Loop and John the Barker the two function as measures of a different kind of reality proclaiming the vitality of fictive life. That the Seven Cities of Cibola are as real as the green horse and its nightmares to the artist who plays our logic is made clear through Jake the Barker's distinction between two kinds of meaning "eros appeal to me more than logos" (p.25). Reed organizes his aesthetic discourse around the polar opposites of realistic mimesis and playful artistic improvisation. The improvisation centre of Loop's art is emphasized by one of his adversaries:

Loop seems to be scatting arbitrarily using forms of this and his own. He's blowing like that celebrated musician Charles Yardbird Parker improvising as he goes along.46

It is this improvised language of the rebellious individual artist that Reed locates at the centre of his

aesthetic discourse. He subverts official language through idiosyncratic spelling, capitalization, word play and philosophical rebelliousness. He sharpens the subversion with the free use of the vocabularies of HooDoo and jazz improvisation.

Free use of vocabularies of HooDoo and jazz-improvisation are basic to the speech of all Reed's protagonists. All of Reed's language concerns - from slang to the incorporation of the rhythms and style of jazz to the promotion of the vocabulary of HooDoo - are all subsumed under the notion of the artist's relation to the text. These concerns show the artist as the subverter of official authority.

In Reed's fiction not only iconographic words but iconographic figures promote discourse. For instance, at the beginning of the novel each of the circus figures is a version of the artist, each of them from the juggler to the fortune teller Zozo Labrique, is iconographic. It is through Zozo that Reed carries the aesthetic discourse further for he relates through her the black aesthetic imagination to the HooDoo spirit. Zozo's dying words to Loop invokes the unseen spirits from which the HooDoo artist draws his power. She tells him not to forget "the
wangols", "the mojo" and "the gris gris" she has taught him and then says thus:

"When you need more power play poker with the dead". 47

The qualitative jump in Reed's art from The Free-Lance Pallbearers to Yellow Back Radio Broke Down reflects a definite improvement which could be illustrated by a comparable development in textual and linguistic achievement. In the first novel, for instance, Bukka 8 says of Sam's mother "Dead as a doornail she died mean and hard (p.1). The idiom being made only slightly more striking through alliteration. In Yellow Back Radio Broke Down a cowboy exclaims "Buigo proof and my man in doornail country". The improvement from the cliche "dead as a doornail" to the metaphoric connotation of "doornail country" is clearly visible.

Linguistic dexterity, linked with a coherent, often far-fetched, use of lexical resources gives Reed's fiction an artistic coherence. Meaning is impacted from one term to another, from one episode to the next, like a ball in a pinball machine ringing bells, lighting markers bumping back and forth and scoring again and again. In Yellow

Back Radio Broke Down Reed's language is characterised by the blending of many styles and levels to which an often near phonetic transcription gives a degree of homogeneity. Michael Fabre remarks that syntax and use are less strictly African-American than in Reed's first novel and hardly realistic rather than ethnic speech, they reconstruct the parlance of the media as befits the genre. The vocabulary ranges from pseudo scientific terms like "oviposit" to words disfigured by common usage like "stifficate". There is carriage and at the same time Reed resurrects a number of obsolete terms particularly black slang of the 1920s and specific agricultural vocabulary. An example of this is "woodshed" which is superbly fitted to Loop's improvisation of a VooDoo ritual in his cave.

Another is "mittman" which seemed to spring from some Teutonic dream and has a touch of the pimp, and Sal Mustache ecstacally applies it to Loop. The term takes on its full meaning when it is applied to a religious character by association with Christ. It seems to be a

Reedian transcription of myth-man though it was coined half a century ago. The abundant similes Reed uses in his novel are as hilarious as they are appropriate. Drag Gibson for instance has "an ego as wide as the grand canyon". The guillotine invented by the French, is a device said to be as rational as their recent revolution. An utterance may lose track of itself as when Drag says thus:

"I'm a big man in these parts, fish fill my full I mean full fish my swim" (p.74),

and stops short without even bothering to correct his sentence, yet gets an appropriate response from Sal. Or, noises simply become language such as Chief Showcase's "yuk, yuk, yuk" or the Marshall's "har, har, har" and so do other sounds which belong to comic strip captions. Comedy often arises simply from the accumulation or agglomeration of terms such as in the sentence "We have braved alkali, coyotes, wolves, rattlesnakes, catamounts, hunters".

Sometimes, this is coupled with grotesque descriptions:


50Ibid., 175.
"The street was a dumpheap of Brueghel faces of Hogarth faces, of Coney Island hot dog kissers ugly pusses and sinking mugs, whole precincts of flat peepers and silly lookers. The sun's wise broad lips smiled making the goats horny with cosmic seed as monstrous shapes who could never unbend their hands all looked as the Marshal ripped off his badge, boarded his horse and rode out of town". 51

Here accumulation is less important than juxtaposition of connotations hinting at widely different fields of references -a lurid, cultured caricature, popular imagery, mythological, pan eroticism all in the context of stereotyped behaviour and surface baroque becomes the mark of surrealism. If one compares the triumphant parade of Eclair Porkchop in Soulsville in The Free-Mance Pallbearer with Pope Innocent ride into Yellow Back Radio town on a bull, one quickly perceives that although they are picaresque and pertinent in both cases, the symbols refer mostly to an invented synthetic system in the former case and mostly to a corpus of beliefs rooted in Western ideological tradition in the latter. The brief apparition of Rev. Boyd as a winged and

51Ibid., 104.
executioned imp is a response to Drag's mockery of Protestants for their lack of allegorical sense. Yet on the semantic level this apparition serves to turn the scene into an extended metaphor or to locate the discourse on the level of a morality play which actually happens in the final dialogue between Pope Innocent and Loop Garoo Kid.

Reed in his second novel sets as a hero a black cowboy. Loop Garoo Kid whose name means "change into" is a HooDoo fetish. His name is associated with loup garou, a werewolf, a creature of metamorphosis. It is derived from the Haitian Congo spirit Bacca Lamp geron an especially powerful loa characterized as a demonic figure who resists the forces of order and repression. Uncle, the cunning and the trickster-like antics of Uncle Julius in Chestnutt's *Conjure Woman* shaped Loop's character. He is not a black cowboy with a cleft-foot, a cowboy version of High John, the conqueror—the super hero of slave folklore—but he was with ghost lobes and a cawl over his face, the signs of a two-head or HooDooman. He is the founder of the American HooDoo church.

The Loop is Lucifer, bringer of light, the rebel angel Satan. He is also Prometheus who comes to Earth to
free mankind from the tyranny of gods. The idea of angels descending from heaven and passing themselves off as human is referred to in black folklore as "mangelizing". In a way Reed in Yellow Back Radio Broke Down mangelized the personnel of Judeo-Christian divinity. Loop resembles in many respects Bill Pickett, a black cowboy of the histories of the west. A loop is itself continuous and the Loop straddles time—ancient Egypt to modern Las Vegas and beyond. Loop also suggests the completion of an electrical circuit which is fitting in the context of the radio/video imagery the novel exploits.

Loop claims that he is a 'comic jester', (p.165) more harmless than any kind of sacrificial scapegoat in the tragic mode. When he crashes in upon the scene of Drag's second wedding on rancher's own green horse Drag refers to him as 'black magician'. At the end of the novel Loop claims that he is the apocryphal son of God. Loop is a mythic hero. He is a creature of diverse parts, several ethnic backgrounds as well as posessor of past powers derived from several religions.

The syncretic nature of Loop makes him a truly American character. Unlike Bukka a fool and an
ineffectual Nazarene apprentice of *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, Loop functions as an active representative of the power inherent in the mythic history of the black. As an avant garde artist who works to liberate language without mistaking his role as a writer with a mission, Loop remains conscious of the critical establishment he derides. Marian E. Musgrave remarks that Loop's character in one sense can be interpreted as representing the rebellion of an artist against externally imposed sanctions. The circus, as in Reed's first novel, becomes a metaphor for artist's freedom.

With his magic spells and the supernatural help of the African python god and HooDoo's magical powers, Loop triumphs over the technology and the hydra-like embodiment of white greed and racism. Loop, the 'houngan' as hero establishes VooDoo as a viable counter tradition to the officially recognized beliefs of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It also defines that an artist is a maker of spells or wangols ("ouangas"). Reed defines an African-American artist as a conjurer who works juju upon his

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52 Marian E. Musgrave, "Sexual Excess and Deviation as Structural Devices in Guntur Grass' *Blechtrommel* and Ishmael Reed's *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, *CLAJ* 22 (1979) 52.
oppressor, a witch doctor who frees his fellow victims from the psychic attacks launched by demons. 53

As for power defined as the power of the private property dictating governmental and papal policies, it remains akin to the dictatorship of Harry Sam in The Free-Lance Pallbearers. Drag Gibson, the embodiment of power of private property and Judeo-Christian culture is, like Harry Sam, characterized by lust, violence, greed and treachery. Like Sam, he is surrounded by a team of ruthless sycophants and ruffians. He stinks of formaldehyde, offending even his cowpokes' noses. He is a homosexual and a murderer of women. He has killed six wives and will dispose of the seventh one in the course of the novel.

Military Chief Theda Doompussy Blacknell and politician Pete the Peke are the other two embodiments of power. Drag Gibson's mail-order bride is an interesting representative of a liberated woman who selects her partners and uses them for her own enjoyment and profit. Although Chief Showcase appears first as a dandy and

bizarre parapschical neo-surrealist, he soon develops into a fundamental embodiment of positive culture essence. He remains as an image of the Red Indian, massacred in the name of religion and disposed of for economic purposes. Himself a showcase for the bland display of picaresque ethnicity, the New Indian is doomed to read Military poetry for entertainment. Soon he outwits his more powerful adversary Drag Gibson. Showcase's flattery is steeped in irony. He thus performs the role of mythological trickster. He dissembles and plays several parts employing language as a tool against white power. The Indian is also cast as the superior technologist, the inventor of a flying craft, Bush Beehive, a helicopter. He is an embodiment of the Prometheus spirit and also of Appollonian forces of harmonious blend of mind and body superior even to the Loop.

The Pope, Loop's principal adversary in the novel, is referred to as 'Innocent' but is not otherwise directly identified. Elsewhere Reed has identified the Pope as Innocent VIII in 1448. But there is not much significance for the number. It is the symbolic as well as the historical qualities of his role which are of primary significance. Robert Edward Fox remarks that Pope's name
Innocent is an example of cosmic irony. Reed has taken the Pope out of his Catholic context and transferred him to a place in myth. Innocent is actually Loop's alter ego. They exist side by side like two elements of the symbolic device Reed employs in the novel—the two circles the black one and the empty white (⊂, 0) to separate each paragraph.

On the personal request of the white rancher Drag Gibson, Pope appears in the Western Town of Yellow Back Radio as the corrupt upholder of the white way of doing things to suppress the unruly black cowboy. The confrontation between Loop representing American HooDoo church and the Pope representing American Catholic Church symbolizes the struggle between the two warring churches—the Atonists and the HooDooists. Reed works out this theme in an elaborate way in his subsequent novel Mumbo Jumbo. The Pope has come, in fact, to revolve an acquaintance with Loop but not confront with him. They are intimates 'the white Anti-church' and 'the Black anti-church' the former cynically supporting Judeo Christian religion and church and the latter undermining them. The Pope wants the Loop to return to Heaven to counter the influence of Black

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Diana (Virgin Mary) but Loop is determined to upstage "the other" (Christ). Gibson is totally lost in this shuffling of myths and in the process is reduced to an ineffectual supernumerary in the vast drama Reed unrolls at the end of the narrative.

The ending of the novel provoked controversial opinion\(^1\) from the critics. Neil Schnitaz remarks that at the end, the book dissolves into lectures.\(^5\) In expanding the scope of the narrative in the final section, to give Loop his mythopoeic due, Reed loses the bite of his allusive framework. The ending presents a dazzling array of black arts, bizzare war\(^\dagger\)olian wits and one-liners. Yet this transference of Loop from irked necromancer to Black Eulenspiegel while it frees Loop from the vicissitudes of American history, hardly opens doors to the divine, the projected aim of Neo-Hoodooism. Neil Schnitaz finds that Pope's long lectures about Christianity and Voodoo are a disservice to the novel turning it into a book about HooDoo instead of a HooDoo novel.\(^5\)


\(^5\) Ibid., 135.
It is true that they slow down the narrative considerably but they perform the important function of helping the average American reader to acquaint himself not only with VooDoo as a syncretic religion but also with the cultural ideological warfare which has been waged for centuries in the name of religion. Michael Fabre remarks that they allow Reed to bring together Christianity and VooDoo in a larger spiritual framework.\footnote{Michael Fabre, "Post-modernist Rhetoric in Ishmael Reed's Yellow Back Radio Broke Down," The Afro-American Novel Since 1960, ed. Peter Bruck and Wolfgang Karrer (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1982) 171.}

Innocent and Loop are not only inmates/rivals and friends but also equivalents. Pointing out the significance of Pope's trial of the Loop, Robert Edward Fox remarks thus:

"The Inquisition both as fact and as metaphor is significant in terms of the novel's thematic structure and Reed's concerns in general - an inquiry into the truth of experience that has been neglected or condemned by the forces of intolerance and antiodal fixing of the inquistional persecutional tendencies of the powerful and the privileged."\footnote{Robert Elliot Fox, Conscientious Sorcerers: The Black Post-modernist Fiction of Le Roi Jones/Amiri Baraka Ishmael Reed and Samuel Delany (New York: Greenwood, 1987) 46.}

Reed himself in one of the interviews says that he based the ending of the novel on Carl Jung's theory of the
origin of Satan as "an old gnostic idea of superman derived from art". The conclusion of the novel is both a kind of anarchistic and Tom Mix ending of the symbols of religion. The gods return to art. They return to where they belong as someone contemplates but they do not participate in the world. It is a trick-ending in which finally Loop and Pope return to art.

Loop, created out of his martyrdom at the last minute, joins the Pope. Loop and the Pope seem reconciled - the two churches American Christian Church and American HooDoo church coming together.

Thus by elucidating the racial conflict and the oligarchial problem of a small town in the Old West, Yellow Back Radio Broke Down effectively dramatizes the cultural warfare between the civilization of the blacks and the acquisitive and repressive tendencies of the dominant white culture. Adopting a variety of modes from carnival to morality play, techniques from comic strips, films and vaudeville stage, it effectively satirizes the old West. Through the multilevelled discourse, episodic time structure, free manipulation of conventional

categories of time space and language and dismantling the
genre-the western to its basic components, increased
reader's participation, myth and fantasy, Reed
demythologizes the myth of frontier experience. As a
critique of realism and modernism, it successfully
reflects on the nature of novel. By its free use of
vocabularies of Hoodoo and Jazz improvisation, Yellow Back
Radio Broke Down successfully translates Voodoo,
essentially a religious and cultural consciousness, into a
singular way of writing and establishes it as a viable
counter-tradition to officially recognized beliefs of the
oppressive monothestic Judeo-Christian faith. It
effectively reconstructs a coherent perspective and viable
form from the necessary wreckage of form in his earlier
novel The Free-Lance Pallbearers.