Chapter IV

From Man’s Interminable Isolation to Human Solidarity –

A Metaphysical Quest

“The immediate task of philosophy which is at the service of history, once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms”. (Karl Marx)

_The Outsider_ calls for a careful study of place and nature of existentialist world view in Wright’s career as a literary artist. Wright’s encounter with French existentialism took place in the mid 1940’s at a crucial time when having rejected Communism, if not Marxist perspectives and explanatory principles, he was for the first time without the sustenance and burden of an ideology. Also, in contemplating the possibilities left open for human values in the industrialized West at the close of World War II, he had become utterly disillusioned. His correspondence with Gertrude Stein, among others, documents his rejection of the consumerism and materialistic goals of American life. As Wright turned to Europe as a repository of humanistic concerns, the pronouncements of the leading French existentialists like Sartre, Camus and de Beauvoir undoubtedly played a part in reinforcing Wright’s own pessimistic leanings.

The period from 1946 to 1953 saw the genesis of _The Outsider_ in order to emphasise a possible convergence between Wright’s outlook and that of the French existentialists. _The Outsider_ appeared in 1953 during the height of McCarthyism in the United States and the advent of the Cold War in Europe, two events which had a significant bearing on its initial reception. The year before, Ralph Ellison had published _Invisible Man_, a highly acclaimed novel which made apparent the extremely symbolic nature of racism and its peculiar effect on the individual psyche.
The Outsider is Richard Wright’s first consciously existential novel which does not emphasise racial matter. It is Wright’s attempt to become universal, to move outside the racial paradigm. Cross Damon symbolizes modern man, whose existential dilemma is manifested through an internal rather than an external conflict. Sensitive and intelligent, Cross denies his racial identity and feels free to act upon the world in order to invest it with meaning. In doing so, he accepts a great deal of responsibility and displays divine or demonic power in the new life he has created for himself as Lionel Lane. Such actions on the part of an individual come at great cost, however; for Cross struggles to understand its meaning and consequence on his life.

This existential analysis was accepted by and large due to the similarities between Wright’s novel and The Chips Are Down, a novel by Jean Paul Sartre, a leading French intellectual and proponent of existentialism whom Wright had come to know in Paris. It must be seen against the background of anti-colonialism, anti-fascism, and anti-racism, sentiments all shaped by Cold War politics and Wright’s own personal experiences in organized political movements.

When The Outsider first appeared, the chief opinion was that, Wright had simply transformed himself into an existentialist, he was drawn to existentialism through his own experiences and that he ultimately rejected versions of the philosophy that broached nihilism or discarded collective solutions to social existence. Wright leaned toward existentialism long before the philosophy earned its literary reputation in America and perhaps even before he fully realized the philosophical position which he was articulating. Like Sartre he retained Marxism as his larger framework, seeking to find a means by which to participate in the centuries old effort to abolish exploitation.
The Outsider is that rare thing in contemporary American fiction, it is a novel that treats seriously problems of freedom, ethics, and morality, the dilemmas of politics and religion, and the paradox of racism in a democracy. Ultimately The Outsider is concerned with the meaning of being and the significance of life in a universe that makes no particular judgments about the value of man. Wright’s The Outsider attains a tremendous accuracy in the aim of showing his existentialism. The author depicts his protagonist Cross Damon as the historical and metaphysical rebel. He is more representative of a type whose intelligence made him grapple with the ethical and metaphysical problems of a society which had lost the sense of the sacred and in which the collapsing of values means that everything is permitted.

The Outsider represents a very important fragment of Wright’s thinking; through Cross Damon the protagonist he attempts to reconcile his basically humanitarian and liberal beliefs with a profound feeling that man is fundamentally amoral and anarchistic. Cross Damon finds it impossible to reconcile freedom and order in his own personality, and despairs when he realises that such reconciliation can ever be effected in society as well. Wright’s philosophy is that fundamentally, all men are potentially evil. Every man is capable of murder and violence and has a natural propensity for evil. He is alone against the odds of nature, chance, fate and the vicissitudes of life. All that he has to use in his defence and the direction of his existence are his reason and his will. By the exercise of reason and will, he can operate for the little time he has to live.

Wright, of course, had always conceived of the novel as a means of working out his ideas. The chief problem he poses in The Outsider is how to achieve individual freedom without impinging on the freedom or humanity of others. It is this central problem on which all the other problems of the novel hinge. The theme of The Outsider is Cross’s search for freedom but true freedom, he finds, is but another expression of the
will to power. That man will ever be a prey to his compulsion; that in seeking his freedom man becomes an enslaver of others. But along with the pessimism there exists the germ of hope.

Cross Damon is an existential hero who escapes from his nightmarish life to exercise his freedom and to shape for himself the kind of life he felt he wanted. He is an intellectual Negro, the product of the culture which rejects him. He is further alienated by his habit of incessant reflections, his feeling that the experiences and actions of his life have so far taken place without his free assent, and a profound conviction that there must be more to life, some meaning and justification which have hitherto eluded him.

“Could there be a man in whose mind and consciousness all the hopes and inhibitions of the last two thousand years have died? A man whose consciousness has not been conditioned by our culture? A man speaking our language, dressing and behaving like we do, and yet living on a complete different plane? . . .” (426)

In rejecting Communism years before Wright had very nearly despaired of mass social action as a means of discovering freedom. Nonetheless his interests and activities in nationalist movements are evidence that Wright had not given up altogether.

Cross Damon is an outsider all his life. As a postal worker living in Chicago, he feels himself outside the pale of a loving, protecting family. He feels himself outside the accepted rules of etiquette. The protagonist is struggling against either a life outside of the world, a confrontation with God or an existence made up of dreams, rather nightmares.
A black postal clerk living in Chicago, a relatively young intellectual Cross Damon is trapped in a dead end and bleak existence. He feels overwhelmed by tremendous burdens. Stifled by a shrewish wife he no longer loves, an emotional mother he both loves and hates, a pregnant mistress, and the routine job, out which he struggles to create an independent and more authentic existence for himself. His quest for a new existence passes through freedom and rebellion.

The first burden in Damon's life is his failed marriage into which he had been gently forced by Gladys. His wife Gladys Damon is a shrew, after the birth of their twins she spends her time squeezing him for money. “Expenses increased and Cross’ salary was squeezed. Gladys now had her hands full while Cross worked extra hours to pull in more money” (71). She violently subdues Damon and does not assume her role of a housewife. Damon's resentment at being lured into marriage has grown into a rage that he frequently and violently vents on his wife. He forewarns Gladys that her time for this kind of behaviour is running out: “Do you want to go? Or do you want me to go? I told you I was drunk, didn’t I?” (70).

Cross’ need for revenge shows itself very clearly in his scenes with his wife when he attempts to prove to her that he is crazy so she will drive him out of the house. “He was far from planning anything overtly criminal; it was a complicated psychological attack whose consequences would clarify Gladys’ feelings about him . . . It would have to be so decisive that she would tell him to go and never come back” (72). When Gladys finally reaches a nervous frenzy and sends him away, Cross feels good. He has no intention of letting anyone control his life, neither his wife, his mistress, the postal officials, nor the communists. Because he feels like an outsider, who must prove to himself his own worth.
Another problem in Damon's life is his emotional mother. She is too religious and pious and troubles her son with guilt. “He was aware, intimately and bitterly, that his dread had been his mother's first fateful gift to him. He had been born to her not only physically but emotionally too” (21). His unsuccessful relationship with his mother comes to a point of hatred and biological bitterness. His mother's religion and resulting in his fanatical behaviour are mixed with this. Dread and hatred has motivated his flight from Chicago. He then becomes morbidly curious about everybody's attitude towards him.

From infancy on, Wright tells us, Cross was at the mercy of a mother who imparted guilt and dread into his soul to such a degree that Cross constantly trembled at the brink of his amoral nature which he thought he was aware of. But what he did not know was that the fear, trembling, and nausea that he felt are the suppressed and savage hatred of a mother who made him the scapegoat for all her sorrows. As a child he experiences existential dread, discovering that:

Despite this, his sensibilities had not been repressed by God’s fearful negations as represented by his mother; indeed, his sense of life had been so heightened that desire boiled in him to a degree that made him afraid. Afraid of what? Nothing exactly, precisely . . . And this constituted his sense of dread. (22-23)

Although Wright stresses that Cross’s philosophy and attitudes have been arrived at as a result of his individual experiences and thinking, and not because he is a Negro, there can be little doubt that racial resentments figure in Cross’s psychology. It would be unfair to state that they constitute a major motivation, yet to discount them would be to do the character of Cross an injustice. If, as is made clear from the very beginning, Cross
is his mother’s son, then it must be remembered too that Cross’s mother is a product of Mississippi racism and southern Negro piety. The dread she invests in Cross’s soul is the dread she had learnt as a Mississippi Negro. From time to time an inverse race hatred, Negro for white, manifests itself throughout the novel. Gladys, Cross’s wife, declares she loathes working with whites and relates how, when she was a child, she saw her mother being savagely mistreated by a white man. Gladys tells Cross Damon:

“You didn’t ask me to be,” she said quickly. “I’ve got to got to a cocktail party. You know, the white and colored nurses’ associations are merged and if a colored member doesn’t show up when she’s invited, they might get the notion that we don’t want to belong.” She frowned and stared off.

“Really, I feel out of place in a roomful of whites. I’m afraid I’ll be the only spook there.” (65)

Working class Negroes in a bar make a joke to the effect that whites are terrified that people in flying saucers may be colored. “. . . Most of the folks on this earth is colored, and if the white folks knew that the other worlds was full of colored folks who wanted to come down here, what the hell chance would the white folks have?” (34)

Cross must pretend to be an abject black man in order to acquire a birth certificate. Bob Hunter’s wife says she does not go to church because she could never kneel before a white man. And the Communists attempt to seduce Cross by their promises of racial revenge. It is through Cross Damon’s character and environment Wright relates all these instances of racism.

The third burden in Cross Damon’s life is his love affair with his mistress Dorothy Powers. He had met Dot in a liquor section of the South Centre Department Store, there was a huge sale of bottles of Jamaica Rum for three dollars. She had lied to him that she
was seventeen, when she was really sixteen, and allowed herself to become pregnant in order to keep him to herself away from Gladys she refused to accept his honest confession about him being a family man. “All his life he had been plagued by being caught in relations where others had tried to take advantage of him because they had thought him supine and gullible; . . .” (37) he feared that happening with Dot.

The final problem which troubled Damon is his boring and troublesome postal work in Chicago. “At six o’clock he’d report to work and for eight long hours he’d sway upon his feet, drugged with fatigue, straining against collapse, sorting mail like a sleepwalker” (15). He and his friends spend most of their leisure and work time together, chatting about sex, racism, sports, the meaning of life and death, and their dreams about their future. Damon is a Southern Black man who, like many other southern Blacks, escapes his southern roots in Mississippi to transplant himself into what is perceived to be a more desirable environment for Blacks, in Chicago.

Damon and other black postal workers suffer under extreme conditions of discrimination in their work environment; Damon is subjected to a shift of sorting mail under the scrutiny of white supervisors who go out their way to inflict stress and tension upon him. Because of all these tremendous burdens, Cross Damon feels insulted of being alive, humiliated at the terms of existence. He feels a kind of nausea prior to any existential choice. Damon is an archetypal figure symbolizing vividly the dilemma of many people from an existential perspective. The novel takes the reader on a journey with Cross Damon as he goes through the drudgery of his everyday life.

Although Damon is guilty of physical violence, he presents an occasion for seeing another kind of violence, perhaps more dangerous and deadly. Prefiguring the debates in a variety of disciplines as well as the historical events of the 1960s, Cross’s world is
characterized by what may be called symbolic violence, or various ways in which authority and power over his life become the domain of others. He has a dead end, low paying job at the Post Office which requires that he stop taking his evening classes and undergoes the humiliation of borrowing money on a regular basis.

In addition to having to confront the racist insults and paternalism of his white superiors, Cross Damon finds that his personal business his girlfriend’s pregnancy and his wife’s complaints is public information in the Postmaster’s office. “‘You colored boys get into a lot of trouble on the South Side,’ Finch gave a superior smile. ‘You must have a hot time out there every day, hunh?’”(89) In the end, he is regarded by the Postal Union secretary Finch as just another coloured boy who can’t get his act together. That Finch knew all that was going on in his personal life and that he was no more in control of his life made his self-hatred too much to bear.

Cross’s articulation of issues of domination, violence, and victimization makes him a uniquely crafted individual, sought to interpret his social and psychological phenomena. In the early sections of the book, Cross is aware that victimization can stimulate violent aspects of one’s character, and he engages in violent actions as an effective means for releasing himself from the control of others. Thus, Cross is growing increasingly aware of the way violence can be used against him as well as the way he can employ it for his own ends. He traps Gladys by pretending insanity and abusing her, hoping she will want to divorce him. In turn, he is trapped by his girlfriend Dot, a minor, who falsely accuses him of the violent act of rape, hoping to coerce him into child support. Dot’s friend Mary has consulted a lawyer concerning Dot’s predicament, “‘Tell Dot that she’s got to hang on to her birth certificate; it’s her quickest way of proving that she’s under sixteen. My lawyer says that as she’s not sixteen, Damon’s guilty of rape . . .’”(50) These examples further problematize the meaning of violence. For once
violence-ideological, symbolic, or physical is understood to be an acceptable tool of
domination, then the categories of resistance and accommodation are not what they
appear to be.

A subway accident in which he is believed to have been killed provides him with
an opportunity to escape his dreadful life. When authorities use his overcoat and the
identification papers he has left behind, after climbing from the train crash, to identify
another victim as him, Cross Damon decides to abandon his job, and his family, and so he
sets out to create his identity, controls his own destiny, and thus he hopes to discover
truth. This search for the absolute compels him to four murders and ends his despair in
violent death. After assuming a number of aliases he journeys to New York. Yet, before
he leaves Chicago, he murders a co-worker Joe Thomas to protect his secret. It is because
of his insistence on being free that he originally decides to take advantage of the accident,
it is because of his faith in his intelligence that he finally takes on the dreadful task of
creating a new personality from scratch. Competing with the communists in a game for
his soul is also an intellectual challenge to him, as are his conversations with Ely
Houston, the hunch backed, District Attorney.

In New York City, Cross Damon struggles to create a new identity. At first, he
finds himself at the centre of the world of the laws of his own feelings. But now, Damon
believes strongly that what man is perhaps too much to be borne by him. It is important to
remark that he usually thinks in a stream of consciousness fashion. Cross Damon takes
first the name of Addison Jordan so that alienation is further prolonged in his lost
identity. He further adopts the identity of Lionel Lane, a dead man, and becomes
involved with the communist couple Gilbert and Eva Blount. After meeting Damon alias
Lionel Lane, the communist couple invite him to share their apartment in Greenwich
Village. He tells Blimin “…Look, as soon as I hit this city and touched the party, my life’s turned upside down-” (549).

In Greenwich Village, Cross Damon starts exploring his new psychological freedom. Cross Damon’s life as a communist and his disillusionment with the Communist Party begins here. Actually, a diatribe against communism is a part of Damon’s existentialist adventure in the novel. Damon joins the Communist Party because he believes in a world revolution, particularly as the correct solution for the blacks who are the only downtrodden of the American society. In short, Damon has been won over to Communism because of the Party’s position on racism and segregation. His commitment to Communism corresponds to his quest for help and security, and constitutes a loophole to escape his predicament and to grow intellectually.

He discovers and reads Eva Blount’s diary from which he learns that Gil Blount has deceived her by marrying her not out of love but because the Communist Party has ordered it. Eva Blount, a young expressionist painter who exhibited before her marriage to Gil Blount, a communist. At that point she was forbidden to display her works publicly, since the communists feared her message of independent thinking. Cross perspicaciously identifies this same jealousy of power in fascism, capitalism, and religion. “Cross … marveled at the astuteness of both Communist and Fascist politicians who had banned the demonic contagions of jazz” (269). Any organization that wants man’s minds cannot allow freedom of artistic expression in painting, drama, or novels. Alarmed over this cynical violation of individual rights, Damon vows that the Party will not destroy his freedom and humanity. He further protests that the discipline of the Party is too much for him, feeling that a man should be free to behave as he pleases and not be ordered to do what the political party wants to do.
Besides he feels that one should have complete autonomy over his life. That is why; his revolt is also nourished by the violation of Eva Blount’s rights; he identifies himself with Eva. That he has violated Eva’s privacy never enters his mind. “She was a victim like he; the difference was that he was a willing victim and she was an involuntary one . . . She protested and he said yes. And a world yawned between his yes and her no . . .” (285) Cross Damon and Eva Blount become lovers, following her naïve assumption that Damon is a powerless victim. In, an attempt to protect her from the monstrousness of himself, Damon keeps on lying to Eva Blount because he feels ashamed of himself and was afraid that Eva would desert him. Eva is the only person he feels guilty about; he feels uncomfortable in the knowledge of her submission to him, in the fact that while he loves her he betrays her trust. His despair increases. Finally Cross Damon unburdens himself to Eva, but she cannot bear the truth:

She was edging away from him; her eyes reflected horror.

“But I thought you were against brutality- . . . I thought you hated suffering-.”

“I do!” he shouted. “That’s why I did it! I couldn’t stand the thought of it, the sight of it . . . !”

She did not believe him; she could not believe him. . . She paused, looked wildly about her, then ran into the living room and slammed the door. (534-535)

and commits suicide by jumping out of a window. His only emotional tie had been with Eva Blount. In his dire need for companionship he had made a promise to protect and to defend Eva and that he was unable to keep. It was his “his self-love as well as self-
hate”(542) that he had broken his bond with Eva. “Eva . . . Eva . . . He was alone” (542).
The party would be suspicious of him from now onwards, it was a right moment to leave New York and try to rediscover himself again elsewhere.

It isn’t until he is near his death that Cross finally realizes the inalienable bond that men have with one another. His only emotional tie had been with Eva Blount, wife of Gilbert Blount one of the communists he had killed. After Eva’s death Cross Damon, alone, enters the streets of Harlem and hides in theatres until Communist Party members track him and shoot him down, bleeding, confused, only half comprehending what has happened to him, Damon is utterly defeated. It isn’t until he is at the last moments of his death that Cross Damon finally realizes the inalienable bond that men have with one another. Cross Damon explains in existential terms to Ely Houston, the lawyer: “don’t think I’m so odd and strange... I’m not ... I’m legion... I’ve lived alone but I’m everywhere” (585) he warns of a new era when men will stop deceiving themselves about their murderous nature and the meaninglessness of life. Dying Damon is asked by Ely Houston what he has found in life. He responds: “‘Nothing . . . ‘Never alone . . . Alone a man is nothing . . . Man is a promise that he must never break. . .’” (585).

In fact, the major conflict of The Outsider revolves around the ideological battle between Cross Damon, existentialist, and the hierarchy of the communist party both extremists: one in favour of absolute freedom, the other advocating total repression. Here Wright re-examined the problem of the ethical criminal in the role of Cross Damon. He is an intellectual, he has read Heidegger, Jaspers, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Dostoevsky. Violence gives Cross Damon a sense of meaning, a sense of freedom in a world that is otherwise hostile or chaotic. After committing two murders Cross experiences fulfilment. “The universe seemed to be rushing at him with all its totality. He
was anchored once again in life, in the flow of things; the world glowed with an intensity so sharp it made his body ache.” (304)

The fundamental weakness of the philosophy of existentialism is in its definition of freedom. It seems to suppose that everyman is an island entire, a being unto himself. The existentialist is strictly introspective, finding entirely within himself the justification for life in the state. Cross Damon sweats and groans and suffers exquisitely to attain what no man living can ever attain. Cross Damon has no appropriate context in which to give meaning to his action, other than that one he himself had created.

Ironically Wright’s heroes seem only capable of realizing themselves through destroying others. In so doing they isolate and alienate themselves, achieving the antithesis of what they desire: love and brotherhood. Even Cross Damon, hard and ruthless as he is, longs for companionship, for some other rebels like him to talk to, but was helpless, as to where to find them. Rebellion, having become a revolution, looks to replace the reign of grace with that of justice.

Feeling essentially free of guilt, Cross admits to being lonely, an aloneness he felt even while he had been with Gladys and Dot. A new breed of man, he is conscious of his difference and fears his own absolute dedication to self preservation. This fear is compounded by other emotions: the anxiety of having no identity and the alarm of a hunted animal. His only true psychological equal, Ely Houston, the District Attorney, terrifies him. He is the one man who can admit the possibility of Cross Damon’s crime. He too is an outsider, a criminal himself who holds himself in check by tracking other aberrant. His basic impulse also centres in the demonic. But he is dedicated to the control of crime he is, after all, Cross’ most dangerous enemy.
Every time someone tries to get close to Cross Damon, he backs off, afraid. Against his will, however, he is inexorably drawn into conversation with Ely Houston; the District Attorney of New York, with whom he has the truest relationship without any limits, who’s humped back has made something of an outsider of him. Realizing the dangers involved, he is nevertheless so hungry for talk with a kindred soul that he boldly sets forth his philosophy to this man who understands only too well what he is saying. Cross Damon theoretically reveals his criminal nature through analogies that Houston is quick to jump on as familiar and true.

It is to Houston that Cross had stated, “Man is nothing in particular” (172). And it is this clue, coupled with the myriads appearing in their later conversations, that convinces Houston of Cross’ guilt. Although the action is slow, the dialogue reveals the heart of Wright’s thesis: that twentieth century man, a lawless outsider, considers himself a god. The result is pure terror. Huston feels that the man who does not observe laws, believes that he must set right when things go wrong. When these men, for whom all ethical laws are suspended, see a wrong they set out to correct it. Ironically, according to Houston, they are conceivably the real lawgivers. Horrified by the inequalities of justice as it now exists, these rebels ignore its laws and create their own.

Wright was still searching for a satisfactory answer to the meaning of existence. Cross struggles to balance freedom and responsibility, and his reward is alienation, and death at the hands of the Communists. Rather ironically, the so called institution of brotherhood destroys the individualist. Since science and industrial society, destroy the restraining power of traditional religion, men of sufficient courage get the opportunity to feel, and act, as gods, with complete moral irresponsibility. The truth of these statements is brought about in Houston’s remark as, “Man desires ultimately to be a God. . . Man
desires everything... Why not? Desire is a restless, flotation demon... Desire tries to seize itself and never can... It's an illusion, but the most solid one!” (565)

Wright could obviously do nothing more with Cross. The logic of his life committed him to increasingly hideous crimes until he himself would be murdered. Cross, of course, admits his failure; he has stripped himself of all illusions and discovers ultimately only his compulsions, his desires. And these enslaved him. But as Ely Houston the lawyer puts it, desire is itself an illusion because it is almost certain one never gets what he desires. For, man ultimately desires to be God; he wants power and everything.

That Damon has become a demon is further dramatized when district attorney Ely Houston confronts him with his wife and children and blames him for the sudden death of his mother. Houston is unable to make Cross Damon react. Cross Damon acknowledges no one and nothing, when Houston remarks Damon as,

“I’m going to let you keep this in your heart ‘til the end of your days! Sleep with it, you are going to punish yourself, see? You are your own law, so you’ll be your own judge... I wouldn’t help you by taking you to jail... I’ve very little concrete evidence to haul you into court on anyhow; it’s likely I couldn’t convict you.” (571)

Houston is outraged with Cross Damon’s unconcern: “‘You are the lowest sonofabitch I’ve ever seen in all of my life”’ (523)

By demonstrating the consequences of human alienation which causes irrational, irresponsible murder and death in a racist society, Wright highlights the inadequacy of interpretations which privilege individualism. Wright insisted as he had emphasized earlier in his novella of 1944, The Man Who Lived Underground that man must first know himself and understand the dark and mysterious proportions of his own nature.
Freedom without self knowledge is a logical contradiction. When carried to its logical conclusion Cross Damon declares just before he dies to Ely Houston, the lawyer, his genuine thought: “I wish I had some way to give the meaning of my life to others . . . To make a bridge from man to man . . .” (585).

As an existentialist, Damon firmly believes that his life is governed by unseen forces. His decisions are not his, but are governed by someone else. And so at the end of the novel, he considers himself innocent even after having committed four murders. This makes Damon a perfect example of an existentialist character. Even as he dies he clings to his innocence when Houston asks him gently about the meaning of his life. Damon replies “Because in my heart . . . I’m . . . I felt . . . I’m innocent . . . That’s what made the horror . . .” (586).

But other institutions had been slowly eroding Cross’ manhood and identity all through his life. The institutions of marriage, the government in the guise of the postal officials, religion, each has had a hand in his destruction. The capitalist democracy is to be blamed. The Communist institution is challenged and intrigued by the ideological battle waged by Cross Damon, so they murder him.

Cross Damon’s initial response toward the Communists is ambivalent, comprised of disgust and admiration. What they preach totally opposes his philosophy, since they require him to release his will to them, to negate himself, to blot out his life and only listen to the party. Yet he understands them. He admires their power, the fact that they have found an answer to live by to rule by. They are the new Grand Inquisitors, the mutant offspring of Nietzsche the spoiled fruit of nihilism.

Wright refocuses his thoughts on the revolutionism of the Marxist Communist and that of the metaphysical rebel. Early in the novel Cross Damon finds himself in conflict
with the Communist Party not because he is so different from other Communists, but because he is so much like them. The Communists, he discovers, use idealism and ideology to mask their real intentions, their will, their desire for power. For Cross Damon, too, power is an end in itself; it is the basic ingredient of human nature; it is fundamentally a kind of libidinal assertion that often conceals itself in altruistic motives and the myths of humanitarian religion and ideology.

When Cross murders two Communists Gilbert Blount and a fascist Langley Herndon, his motives seem to be derived more from what he regards as his victims desire to enslave him psychologically, rather than from any detached, intellectualized, conscienceless compulsion on his part. Soon afterwards, Cross mulls over his deeds. It suddenly seems terribly complicated to him. He has killed two little gods without regret, but he himself “had acted like a little god...” (308).

To destroy the little gods he must himself become a god. And to become god is to commit murder. Cross Damon is an intellectual criminal. He is not driven to murder through passion love or hate; he is not pathological. He kills because he believes that he has the perfect right to. When Langley Herndon initiates a violent argument with Gil Blount, ostensibly to stop Blount and Herndon from fighting Cross Damon kills both men and arranges the ewes so that it appears they have killed each other. Cross is torn by the rebel’s eternal dilemma: that of having to fight evil with evil. Since “Hilton had proof of his guilt!” (394) of having murdered Herndon, he decides to kill Jack Hilton. He fears that Hilton will reveal his guilt. However, that final murder reignites the suspicions of the Party and another high ranking communist Bliming is chosen to examine Damon.

Fascinated by the will to power of the Communists, Cross is lured into a deadly combat of the will with these gods. He begins to live; his trance-like state evaporates. He
struggles valiantly, but he loses. And he loses because the Communists work from such a limited perspective that they cannot grasp the motives of a psychological man. Because of their near-sightedness, their failure to admit any subjectivity in men, they misjudge Cross, eventually shoot him as a counter revolutionary.

A desire for order consumes Cross Damon. For example, he kills Hilton because he is convinced that Hilton is determined to make him a slave by controlling his life, curtailing his freedom. He cannot tolerate what he calls meaningless suffering therefore anyone who inflicts it on another must be stopped, so he tells Hilton: “I might forgive you if you had been going to kill me. But, no; you were going to make me a slave….I’d have suffered, night and day. You would have dominated my consciousness. No, no, Hilton, there’s more here than you say. . .” (402-403).

Although he claims to be a reluctant victim of his compulsions to set the world straight, he can’t quit. He can’t stop the one thing that keeps him trapped his continual killing he tells Hilton, “‘I won’t stop; I can’t stop as long as men like you keep playing your dirty, tricky games,’ Cross said; and there was a genuine despair in his voice. ‘I won’t ever feel free as long as you exist, even if you aren’t hunting me down. You and men like you are my enemies. . .’” (400). Possessed by outrage, Cross kills Hilton as a protest against coercion, outrage, ironically depriving the man of what he demands for himself, the freedom to control his own destiny and thus breaking the code of rebellion.

Damon is almost prophetic with his premonition that the time has come to get out of the Communist party. Communists have always said that the day will come when no one will dare admit his affiliation with the Party. They owe him nothing, and whatever he owes them he feels he has paid. What he does is his own individualism, his maverick nature, his desires to be a loner and not a joiner, his alienation from everything and
everybody, the pattern of his life to break away from everyone to stand rootless and alone and his consistent determination to remain an outsider.

The verses from the Bible admonishing the believer not to trust others make Cross Damon spurn and reject all ideologies and organized religions. Existentialist Damon believes Marx’s dictum that religion is the opiate for people. By the beginning of Part III, “Descent,” Cross has concluded that communism can become the impetus he needs to discover himself, “It was an emotional compulsion, religious in its intensity, to feel and weigh the worth of himself that was pushing him into the arms of the one thing on earth that could transform his sense of dread, shape it, objectify it, and make it real and rational for him” (254). But by the end of the section “Dread” is still with him, and his life has been converted to a terrifying nightmare by the double murder he has committed. His life has turned to a nightmare with no ways of escape. Besides suffering from the anguish of not yet being himself, Cross also exhibits signs of anxiety.

Haunted by his own meaninglessness and the absurdity of the human condition, Cross strives to create meaning for himself without having to sacrifice himself. He recognizes that his mother and Sarah eventually surrender themselves to the church in return for meaning. He identifies this same impulse to avoid doubt and insecurity in the communists, especially in Menti, whom he sees as having totally sacrificed himself to the party to be used by them in order to escape spiritual anxiety.

By this stage in his life, Wright had little sympathy left for the communists; his hero is equally disgusted by fascists and communists, branding them both societies of little gods. Given the opportunity to reveal his rather Nietzschean philosophy during a grilling by Blimin, Cross lashes out at Communism, Fascism, and Capitalism. Finding in
all three systems the drive to total power, Cross condemns them and their industrial sources. As far as he is concerned, the dominant factor in human existence is fear.

Cross Damon builds his freedom at the expense of others: “Bad faith wasn’t unknown to Cross; not only had he long been guilty of it in his personal relations, but he was convinced that bad faith of some degree was an indigenous part of living” (173). He steals his freedom from the three women to whom he is committed by law or deed: his mother, his wife Gladys, and his pregnant mistress Dot. He maintains his freedom by wantonly murdering two men, a fascist Langley Herndon and a communist Gil Blount locked in deadly combat, negating the purpose of either murder by killing both ideological paradigms.

Another manifestation of Cross’ extreme neurosis is the extraordinary depth of his self-hate. All through the book he despises himself, often becoming overwhelmed with feelings of self-loathing. Cross, therefore, externalizes his own self-hate when he sees Bob Hunter grovelling in front of Gil Blount for his life. Like other arrogant types, Cross has very little, if any, sympathy for others (92). He is lacking in human compassion basically because he envies others their place in life, feeling himself to be outside it. Finally, because of his need to deny his positive impulses, Cross’ self hate convinces him that he is unlovable. Therefore, the one person he tries to love Eva, must be sheltered from his true nature.

Cross realizes that futility of what he has tried to do in his death bed. Motivated by unconscious psychological factors and conscious philosophical premises, Cross has attempted to live alone, in complete control of his life. Given the unique opportunity of being able to create a new personality for himself, Cross can do no better.
Cross Damon rejects institutionalized values to assert freedom as an absolute staple of his existence. Alienation and moral and psychological isolation give Cross a new lease on life. Science and industry have together destroyed these illusive myths. Religion is dead. All men are atheists.

The next section of The Outsider, “Despair,” records the philosophical conversations between Cross and Houston and Cross and Blimin; the first a dialogue of psychologically akin outsiders, the second more a monologue from an independent god to a totalitarian one. Another manifestation of Cross’ extreme neurosis is the extraordinary depth of his self-hate. All through the book he despises himself, often becoming overwhelmed with feelings of self-loathing.

In the latter portion of the book, and especially in the restored sections, Cross’s resistance to the power and authority of others becomes stronger as does his desire to become the agent for the liberation of others. He refers to his acts as ethical murder but decides he cannot confess, and is obliged to “lie, to dodge, to blend with the changing hues of the foliage . . .” (311). He queries Menti, a Communist functionary who has been discharged to spy on him, “But . . . don’t you feel that you’ve got some value that’s yours and yours alone?” (372). Such instances are telling, for the reader realizes that Cross’s actions are inspired by his desire to empower himself and others.

Cross Damon, felt that being a Negro did not trouble him. That is to say, he is a black American not because of his colour but also because of virtue of some of his qualities: his loneliness, his feeling of innocence, his desire for community and his alienation extreme. As a result of his race Cross Damon has never been and never will be an integral part of the American fabric. And because he has always stood outside life, he has never really participated in the heritage of his own people, although he does identity
with the jazz he hears in a bar, and the first of his new identities is that of a Negro from the Deep South. But at other times he tries to dissociate himself from his race, claiming that he does not act the way he does because he is black.

Wright is obviously trying to go beyond the tension of black and white relations to the larger question of what is man. To do this he creates a man presented with the unlikely opportunity of being able to create a brand new life for himself. Therefore, when Cross leaves Chicago he relinquishes his place in the world. He becomes a man without a name, without a home, without a past. Having given up on the world of Gladys his wife, Dot his mistress, and Joe Thomas his friend, he must invent his own.

This reconfiguration of a black protagonist suggests several things: first, that Wright was deepening his analysis of modern racism through the useful prism of philosophical existentialism; second, that he was very conscious of framing the character of Cross Damon and third, that Wright intended for the reader to understand Cross through the questioning of his own condition and motivations. According to John Reilly: “He created a protagonist formed out of his own experience… Wright provides Damon with the insights of the author” (xxvi). To compensate he turned to rebellion, rejecting the teachings of his own race and the laws of the other. As a result, his self was in continual conflict with the rest of the world.

Deliberately, even defiantly or, perhaps more precisely in despair and disillusionment Cross rejects religion, because the only manifestation he knows of religion is one of hysterical faith. What are left to him to base his philosophy on are only the chimaeras of humanism, a philosophy of man for man which carries with it its own disillusionment and despair. He rejects religion because it seems to him unable to do anything; to offer only an irrational escape, blind flight from reality. His attitude toward
the priest whom he meets on the train to New York clarifies his feelings about religion. He considers him as a savage. Cross is the new man, the rebel who must create his own values without religious guidance.

Cross had to discover what was good or evil through his own actions which were more exacting than the edicts of any god because it was he alone who had to bear the brunt of their consequences with a sense of absoluteness made intolerable by knowing that this life of his was all he had and would ever have. (156-157)

Having given up his old life, Cross is nearly consumed by terror and dread brought on not only by the necessity for inventing himself but also by the fact that he is absolutely alone. His loneliness haunts him, especially after he witnesses his own funeral.

He was empty, face to face with a sense of dread more intense than anything he had ever felt before. He was alone. He was not only without friends, . . . a man tossed back upon himself when that self meant only a hope of hope … Nothing made meaning; his life seemed to have turned into a static dream whose frozen images would remain unchanged throughout eternity. (128-129)

And Cross Damon, who self-consciously embarks on his voyage of rebellion at the outset of *The Outsider*, is nearly torn apart by the nightmare of nihilism; and he too dies violently, murdered by godless tyrants. He dies for the entire world, to begin an era of man-gods. Cross Damon is convinced that all men are atheists and that this means that man can do whatever he wills on this earth.
Because of the death-rebirth symbolism and the moral tone which Cross adopts, many critics have chosen to read this story as Wright’s attempt to reinscribe a politically corrupt world with a moral message. Just as Cross Damon, himself demonic, is born again, so too must the ideas of humankind be grounded in morality. In the end, Cross has no appropriate context in which to give meaning to his actions, other than one he himself has created.

On the whole the French Existentialists were preoccupied with social survival through the restoration of all social norms; and Wright’s final decision, at the end of his metaphysical journey to the end of night, is more the result of intrinsic dread than the outcome of clearly defined, freely made choice. In the course of the narrative a world grounded upon the freedom of existentialist choice does not seem possible. Although he symbolically slays the totalitarian and authoritarian monsters of fascism and Communism, and although he finds in Houston a kindred spirit and an emblematic opposite Damon never really bridges the gap between himself and others, as is made clear by Eva’s suicide when she knows the terrible truth about her lover.

The horrible innocence of Damon as a victim in society and his metaphysical fate as one of the godless race who suffer no obligations, since they recognize no values. At this stage, therefore Wright seems to part ways with the French existentialists. Wright’s view is far more nihilistic than Sartre’s; even though Damon’s final claim is for human solidarity and compassion, the conclusion leaves the reader with the impression that it is a last minute choice inflicted upon the novelist. *The Outsider* remains a fascinating piece of writing and one that still speaks to our present needs.

*Eight men* is a posthumous miscellany of eight of Wright’s prose pieces that had not previously been collected in book form. Two of the stories had been written in the
thirties, three in the forties and three in the fifties. Although *Eight Men* appeared two months after Wright died, it is clear that its publication was no hasty attempt to take advantage of any publicity occasioned by his death, Wright himself had evidently been preparing the book for some time and had anticipated its publication by dedicating it to friends he had made in Paris. Unlike the pieces in *Uncle’s Tom Children*, these stories are not arranged along any progressively thematic lines: instead the order in which they are assembled indicates that Wright was more concerned with showing a variety of styles, and settings, points of view. *Eight Men* mainly deals with Negro oppression and in each of these eight stories Richard Wright presents a situation in which the Negro man is the victim of the white man's inhumanity. In all of them the reader is made aware that the Negro characters are the sensitive ones, the knowing ones, the superior ones, and that appearances are usually wrong, that dominant and prejudiced whites are never right, and that they are to be pitied as much as the wronged Negroes.

Of the eight stories in this posthumous collection, four are bizarre, three are conventional, one is an autobiographical fragment, and all explore the author’s favourite theme: rootlessness. Wright was painfully distressed by his rootlessness, and this anguish was the living substance of his best books, the stuff of which they were made.

The stories in *Eight Men* are representative of the different stages of Wright’s development. Each story centres on a Negro, involved cruelly with his surroundings, beaten down by them, each central figure is in one way or another misunderstood by the world he knows. Altogether the eight men of these stories have in common a desperate qualified heroism. Wright has portrayed his characters realistically. The pieces that he had written in the thirties “The Man Who Saw The Flood,” “The Man Who Was Almost A Man” deal with oppressed southern Negro peasants; the stories of the forties “The Man Who Lived Underground,” “The Man Who Went to Chicago,” “The Man Who Killed a
Shadow” employ an urban setting to depict the Negro’s invisibility, outsider, or displaced status; the stories of the fifties “Man of All Work,” “Man, God Ain’t Like That. . .”, “Big Black Good Man” celebrate in an odd sort of way a kind of Negro nationalism Negro virility as opposed to the white man’s flabbiness, and a proud awareness of an African identity.

In the latter period too there appears now an element of humour albeit sometimes strained or ironic and a lessening of the fierce tensions that had characterized his fiction up until this time. These changes do not necessarily reveal any slackening in Wright’s commitment to Negro equality, but they do suggest that he may perhaps have now discovered himself in the process of acquiring a more even emotional equilibrium. Possibly the success of African independence movements for which he had so long fought encouraged him to believe that a turning point in race relationships had been achieved. Whatever the reasons, the hard narrative drive of Wright’s earlier work is no longer present, and the stories are now more psychological, more sophisticated, perhaps even more self-consciously stories. Yet somehow one feels that these are transition pieces that Wright was moving in a new direction toward new subject matter and new themes and that possibly he might have found what he was looking for, had he not died so young.

That Wright was an artist is evident through some quality in each of these stories. They vary in types, a couple of them “Man, God Ain’t Like That” and “Man Of All Works” rendered largely in dialogue are radio plays commissioned by a station in Hamburg, Germany, are technically masterful having the same sort of symbolism. “The Man Who Lived Underground,” is the story of a fugitive who hides himself in a city sewer because of racism; it is a memorable symbolic piece worthy of long brooding. It is reminiscent of Ralph Ellisons “Invisible Man”, probably Wright was attempting an allegory here. “The Man Who Went To Chicago,” describes hardships of a migrate
worker who comes from North, is really a report, half narrative, half essay, the two halves joining impressively. It is in reality part of an unpublished chapter of *Black Boy*. The protagonist in this story says, “I had elected, in my fevered search for honourable adjustment to the American scene, not to submit and in doing so I had embraced the daily horror of anxiety, of tension, of eternal disquiet” (213). Though it is quietly stated, this philosophy of living might be taken from Wright’s own experience.

“The Man Who Was Almost a Man,” is about a young black boy’s desire to have a gun. Wright’s work includes underlying themes of racism and struggles of an individual. Some of the stories, such as “Big Black Good Man,” are enlivened by Wright’s sardonic humour, the humour of a man who has known and released the full measure of his despair but finds that neither knowledge nor release matters in a world of despair.

That Wright was an artist is evident through some quality in each of these stories. They vary in types from the purely symbolic such as “The Man Who Lived Underground” and “Man, God Ain’t Like That...” to the purely biographical such as “The Man Who Went to Chicago.” The settings are also varied: the South, the North, Scandinavia, and Africa. In style they range from almost pure exposition to almost pure drama entirely dependent upon dialogue.

The African who understood too literally what missionaries had taught him about Christianity in “Man, God Ain’t Like That...,” is a creation of original and affecting worth. Yet, too often and too incredibly, as in “The Man Who Lived Underground,” “Man of All Work,” and “The Man Who Killed a Shadow,” the white man who was the evil figure of Wright’s first works is the unelaborated and unmotivated villain of the last stories. *The Man Who Killed a Shadow* and *The Man Who Went To Chicago* are a straight
autobiographical account of Wright’s Chicago days. They are marked by an honest simplicity characterized the author’s earliest books; it too, drives home a point.

“The Man Who Saw the Flood,” the first of the stories in *Eight Men*, was published initially in 1938 in *New Masses* under the title, “Silt.” Tom, in “The Man Who Saw the Flood,” is a hero of a different order; he makes no real defiance but accepts the slavery of unending financial debt in order to provide for his wife and child.

When the flood waters had receded, the family was slowly finding their way across the muddy fields. The flood waters had been more than eight feet here Tom, May and Sally noted that there were no traces of the henhouse, the pigpen, instead of the road there was “a wide sweep of yellow scalloped silt” (111). Inspite of their determination to make the best of their house which had been ravaged by the floods Tom could find no answer to May’s question as he was looking at the desolate mud-filled fields. “Now, whutcha gonna do, Tom?” (113) The truth that he had to go for further help to the white man Mr. Burgess, who owned the store to ask for help was too painful.

Wright’s other story of the thirties a far more developed piece was first published in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1939 under the title, “Almos’ a Man.” “The Man Who Was Almost a Man” is the story of a sixteen-year-old Dave who works in the fields and dreams of owning his own gun. For him, as for most adolescents, manhood is the highest order of achievement but his paucity of social and emotional experience makes him view that goal in the image of a gun. It is clear from the very beginning of the story that Dave feels himself emasculated not only by his parents and peers, but by the very conditions of his work. The other Negro field hands taunt him, his father frequently beats him, and his mother receives his wages directly from Dave’s white employer, Mr. Jim Hawkins.
After supper Dave finally builds up enough tenacity to ask his mother for two dollars to buy the gun. Mrs. Saunders agrees to give Dave the two dollars he needs as long as he promises that as soon as the pistol is in his possession he will bring it straight home and turn it over to her.

Dave runs out of the door with the money and purchases the pistol from Joe a white storekeeper. On his way home, he stops in the field to play with the gun. Only he is unsure of how to use it, so he pretends to be shooting at imaginary objects. When he reaches house, he breaks his promise and does not surrender the gun. Dave goes to plow the field located near the woods and begins to practice his shooting. He waves the gun around, he closes his eyes and takes his first shot. He realizes that Jenny, the mule has been shot and he tries repeatedly to plug the hole in her body with a handful of “damp black earth” (20). Jenny, the mule, eventually dies a slow crimson death. Mr. Hawkins tells Dave that although it was an accident he will pay two dollars a month for the next two years until he has paid fifty dollars to replace the mule.

That night Dave feels annoyed at having to go back and work for Mr. Hawkins, Wright portrays the mind of the young Blackman in this story,” Lawd, ef Ah had just one mo bullet Ah’d taka shot at tha house, Ah’d like t scare ol man Hawkins jus a little... Jusa enough t let im know Dave Saunders is a man” (26). Dave wanted to escape from slavery. So he jumps aboard a passing train travelling North, his gun still secure in his pocket. He goes away somewhere to be a man. At a certain point in the story Dave in a fit of pique calls himself a mule and on the other hand he may be striking out at his white employer Mr. Hawkins by destroying his property.

Significantly, once the accident has occurred Dave feels free to express his hatred in fantasies of killing the white man. In any event, he is now capable of acting, of making
a decision even if the decision is to flee rather than give up his gun to his father. The
death of Jenny symbolizes failure in Dave who failed to prove that he was responsible
and mature enough not only to handle a gun, but also to behave as a man. Even though
readers know that Dave will probably never find the success of independence or power
he craves, the mere fact that he is willing to risk striking out on his own redeems him and
makes him more than an almost man.

The history of the publication of “Underground Man” offers a suggestive link
between Wright’s Marxist social views and his metaphysical speculations. Originally
published in Accent (Spring 1942) as two excerpts from a novel, Wright published a
considerably fuller version in Edwin Seaver’s Cross-section two years later. In the two
year interval Wright had broken with the Communist Party and had intensified his
interests in philosophy and Freudian psychology. It is of course not possible there appears
to be less emphasis on social injustice in the latter version. The ultimate impression one
carries away is not merely that of social protest, but rather protest against the nature of
man, the human condition what Camus called the metaphysical protest. The 1944 version
becomes essentially a detailed expansion of Wright’s earlier piece.

“The Man Who Lived Underground,” was first published in the journal Accent in
1942. It was originally written as a novel, but Wright could find no publisher for it and
shortened the story to a length that would be suitable for a magazine. In 1960, the
authorized version of the story was included in Wright’s collection Eight Men. When
Fred Daniels, a Negro was returning from Mrs. Wootens for whom he was working. He
was picked by three policemen Lawson, Murphy, and Johnson who had wrongly accused
him of murdering Mrs. Peabody. He descends through a manhole on the street into a
sewer. He dared not go above ground. It was the beatings he received that came to his
mind and how he was forced to sign his name to a confession, the contents of which he
did not even comprehend and he signed it, to end his pain. Sloshing his way through the slime and sewage of the city, he discovers an entrance to the basement of a building adjacent to the sewer. Here he finds tools, and ultimately manages to dig his way through the walls of other buildings adjacent to the sewer. In the course of his underground expeditions, he visits a Negro church and sees a group of black men and women singing with their old song books in their black palms. He was filled with sense of guilt “Pain throbbed in his legs and a deeper pain, induced by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him” (33).

Later Fred Daniels visits an undertaker’s embalming room. While standing in a box in the reserved section of a movie house he sees the viewers who “... were laughing at their lives, he thought with amazement. They were shouting and yelling at the animated shadows of themselves... Yes, these people were children, sleeping in their living, awake in their dying” (38). During the course of his underground adventure he looks into a butcher’s shop, steps into a radio shop and a jewellery, PEER’S-MANUFACTURING JEWELERS. He plunders whatever strikes his fancy: watches, diamonds, a butcher cleaver, a gun, a radio and money and bring these back to the secret cave that he had discovered in one of the buildings.

“He did not feel that he was standing, for the cleaver, the radio, the money, and the typewriter were all on the same level of value, all meant the same thing to him. They were the serious toys of the men who lived in the dead world of sunshine and rain he had left, the world that had condemned him, branded him guilty”. (55)

Fred Daniels is then Everyman and his story is a perfect modern allegory. He finds that from an invisible vantage point. He can view the nefarious behaviour of
respectable people who imagine they are acting unobserved. He comes to understand that the other world in which he dwells is the real world of the human heart and that the surface world which is above him in the streets of the city is senseless and meaningless, a kind of unreality which men project to hide from themselves the awful blackness of their souls. He is invested suddenly with a sense of pity for all mankind. Fred Daniels professes his innocence more than once in the novel and his innocence is not supported by a forgiving, life affirming world. Daniel’s hiding place entrance leads him to transformation and revelation. Fred Daniels is isolated from any concept of community and his isolation is complete. Only in brief movement of recollection does he even mention that he is married. The only thing that identifies him is his colour, and he himself never mentions it. But the culture he lives in dehumanizes by using his colour against him, and because he is defined by colour. In this way the reader begins to understand that Wright has written an Afro-American novel with better insight about a trapped Afro-American male. All men are guilty; it does not matter whether or not he killed the woman about whom he was forced to confess. He was guilty nonetheless by virtue of his being human.

Fred Daniels rises like Lazares to the surface of the city to announce the message charged with zeal of a prophet; he runs first to a church where the choir ironically is chanting a hymn quite opposed to the truth he now knows:

*Oh, wondrous slight upon the cross*

*Vision sweet and divine*

*Oh, wondrous sight upon the cross*

*Full of such love sublime* (76).
He is turned away as being disrespectful. He goes next to the police from whom he had fled. They tell him that they have found the real murderer, and that he is free, but he insists on his guilt and they regard him as deranged. He leads them to the sewer in which he had been hiding, plunges in once again and ask them to follow. But one police man uses a trick to shoot him and he is swept away dead in the scummy water that follows below the city. Because of Fred’s black identity death followed him. The end of the story, is down played Fred Daniel’s blackness, it is Lawson who recognized the essential reason for Daniel’s blackness, as a returned prophet. Lawson’s reason for Daniel’s madness is that:

“What do you suppose he’s suffering from?” Johnson asked.

“Delusions of grandeur, maybe,” Murphy said.

“May be it’s because he lives in a white man’s world,” Lawson said. (89)

He saw Lawson raise the gun and point it directly at him. Lawson’s face twitched, as though he were hesitating, then he shot Fred Daniels.

“What did you shoot him for, Lawson?”

“I had to.”

“Why?”

“You’ve got to shoot his kind. They’d wreck things.” (91–92)

Lawson’s final statement stands a prophetic indictment of white American cultures which has no place for spiritual understanding and exists not as a society of the brotherhood of a man but as a culture that continues to kill off the best of its kind.
It is understandable how in 1944 young French existentialist authors must have seen in Wright’s works a confirmation of their own views. The dread, the terror, the guilt, the nausea had always been basic thematic elements in Wright’s fiction and now in “The Man Who Lived Underground,” they are made the explicit components of the human personality. Like Wright’s heroes, the characters of existentialist authors move about in a world devoid of principles, God, and purpose and suffer horror at their awesome godlike powers as they create their own personalities and values out of the chaos of existence. But in some respects Wright’s heroes are different. They are alienated often enough not from any intellectually reasoned position at this stage in Wright’s career, but by chance happenings in their lives or an accident of birth race, for example.

In Fred Daniels’ case, for instance, he is a Negro who quite by chance happened to be near the scene of a crime. They arrive then accidentally at their insights, and as a result of having discovered themselves outside the rules of conventional social behavior recognize that they are free to shape (and are therefore responsible for) their own lives. But this is not primarily why they suffer guilt. Wright seems to prefer a Freudian explanation; guilt is instinctively connected with the trauma of birth.

Why was this sense of guilt so seemingly innate, so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so verily physical? It seemed that when one felt this guilt one was retracing in one’s feelings a faint pattern designed long before; it seemed that one was always trying to remember a gigantic shock that had left a haunting impression upon one’s body which one could not forget or shake off, but which had been forgotten by the conscious mind, creating in one’s life a state of eternal anxiety. (68)
Hence, for Wright, a man’s freedom is circumscribed by his very humanity. In ways he cannot possibly control, his nature or “essence” precedes his existence. But however different the routes French existentialist authors and Wright may have taken, they meet on common ground in regard to their thrilled horror at man’s rootlessness and at the heroism of his absurd striving.

“The Man Who Lived Underground” undoubtedly owes something in the way of plot and theme to Les Miserables, and to what Camus called the “Dostoevskian” experience of the condemned man: but, above all, Fred Daniels’ adventures suggest something of Wright’s own emotions after ten years in the Communist underground. The air of bitterness, the almost strident militancy are gone momentarily at least and in their place a compassion and despair, compassion for man trapped in his underground nature and despair that he will ever be able to set himself free.

“Big Black Good Man”, which first appeared in Esquire in 1957, is the last story Wright published in his lifetime. Possibly it is the last he ever wrote. In any event it represents a more traditional approach to storytelling. On the other hand “Big Black Good Man” deviates from the usual Wright’s short story. For one thing the narrative by Wright’s standards at least, is practically plotless. Scarcely anything happens. There is no violence, practically no external narrative action, and no change of milieu. The entire story is told in terms of the emotions, attitudes and reactions of a white man.

As the story opens, Olaf Jenson a Dane, Danes are presumably relatively free of racial prejudice. He was a normal petty bourgeois. He was a night porter in a cheap, water-front Copenhagen hotel which catered to sailors and students. When suddenly an enormous black seaman Jim obviously American, who works for American Continental Lines enters, and asks for a room.
He does not regard himself as prejudiced but feels now an almost instinctive terror and hatred for this black giant who makes him feel so puny and white. Although he wants to, he finds himself incapable of refusing the “ebony giant” (96) his demands and among other things he provides him with Lena, a prostitute, for the length of his stay. After six days the “black giant” (98) prepares to leave, but prior to his departure he puts his massive hands around Olaf’s neck.

After he leaves, Olaf is sure that “the evil giant’s” (106) wanted to humiliate him, to prove to Olaf how easy it would be to kill him. A year later “the black beast” (107) returns; Olaf cries out that there are no rooms, but the Negro replies that he does not intend to stay at the hotel this time. He thereupon presents Olaf with six nylon shirts, one for each day he had spent with Lena the previous year and Olaf confesses to the giant that he was frightened and when the black man measured his neck he thought that he will be killed. The black man, on his way out, laughs and calls back, with compassion in his eyes “Daddy-O, drop dead” (109).

The story thus probes Olaf’s psyche not simply in terms of his behaviour, but mainly in terms of his dreams, fantasies, and memories. For the first time Wright has assumed the role of the enemy, the white man and tells the story from his point of view. Olaf’s reactions are, of course, deep-seated sexual responses, feelings of sexual inferiority but, perhaps, above all, feeling of terror of the raw, intense sexuality of life that Negro represents.

For the first time Wright has assumed the role of the enemy and tells the story from his point of view. There is new element of race pride in Wright’s portrayal; the tone of proud defiance has somehow been stilled and by a note of contained racial triumph. It is not quite racial revenge, but it is nonetheless interesting to note that Wright has now
reversed the imagery of much of *Uncle Tom's Children*. Instead of white, there are now black shadows, black mountains, black clouds like stormy sky descending on the terrified Olaf. Yet despite the black man’s mythic proportions Wright still manages to keep him down to earth, chiefly by means of dialogue. One can only say on the basis of this story that Wright himself became aware, momentarily to a sense of pride and self-adjustment. Ironically he could only do this by imagining what the white man felt. The story ends happily, this surprise happy ending gives a O’Henry twist.

“Man of All Work” and “Man, God Ain’t Like That . . .” are written entirely in dialogue with no interceding explanatory prose passages. This kind of dramatic framework has, of course, certain advantages. For one thing, the pace is considerably accelerated, and the climatic confrontations are made more immediately suspenseful.

“Man of All Work,” probably composed in 1953, was inspired by an item which Wright read in *Jet* about a man who dressed himself as a woman in order to find work as a domestic. In a sense this story appears to develop more fully an idea first implied in “The Man Who Killed A Shadow” that racial antagonisms are related in some fashion to serious sexual maladjustment. The story the first of Wright’s dialogue pieces deals with Carl a Negro who informs his wife Lucy that their situation is so desperate that he intends to dress himself in his wife’s clothes and is to seek employment as a maid for the Fairchilds.

The story unfolds in three swiftly changing scenes: Carl’s home, the Fairchild’s house, and back again to Carl’s home. All the reader knows of character and action is what he can infer from the dialogue. The story or play makes a grim little joke about mistaken identity on several levels. Because Carl cannot provide for his wife and children, he has symbolically been denied his virility long before he actually decides to
appropriate the role of the woman. The Fairchild’s, perhaps significantly named, also undergo a similar confusion of sexual roles. It is obvious from the moment Carl applies for the job that Mrs. Fairchild plays the dominant part in her relationship to her husband. She makes it clear to Carl now as Lucy Owens that she regards her husband as an irresponsible child, particularly when he drinks. Perhaps because of the brusque efficient way in which she runs her family, she has, in her way, emasculated her husband, who attempts to recover his virility in drink and Negro girls.

To compound the confusion the Fairchild’s little girl Lily dominates both her parents in this white child centred middle class family. “Man of All Work” brings out the radical discrimination suffered by the Negro woman in the country of the whites. Wright in this piece shows that the black male gets away with something albeit not murder. The final confusion lies in the way whites look at the Negro woman as figure representing both of a wild physical abandon and warm motherhood. Poor Carl now as Lucy Owens, for whom the American culture had effectively deprived of his sexuality, is expected to play both roles and it is in the role of the latter, as mammy nurse, that Wright produces one rather good ironic twist. In what amounts to a parody of Red Riding Hood, the frightening little girl cross-examines her disguised nursemaid.

Wright’s other dialogue piece, “Man, God Ain’t Like That. . .,” is more ambitious in his treatment of European-African relationships. There are number of reasons, but the principle one is that Wright has attempted to impose in fictional form his rather complex ideas about the psychology of imperialism. The plot and action issue from Wright’s preconceptions about Europeans and Africans in certain situations rather than from the actual characters and situations he writes about.
The African boy Babu who understood too literally what missionaries had taught him about Christianity in “Man, God Ain’t Like That…” is a creation of original and affecting worth. In the romantic and mysterious background of the African jungle twenty miles from Kumasi in Babu, one sees the impact of colonialism the white man’s religion and juju the jungle religion. There is a fine thread of humour, romance and mystery all intermingled in this story.

The story opens with a description of a journey a John Franklin, the American Elsie painter and his wife are making through the back country of the Ashanti. John, the artist, feels that he can somehow reinvigorate himself in a primitive setting. In the course of their travels they adopt as their servant a queerly religious Ashanti boy Babu who sings Methodist hymns publicly, but makes strange secret sacrifices to his dead ancestors when he is alone. John regards Babu as an amusing curiosity and takes him with him to Paris.

Babu, who adores his white master, is overwhelmingly impressed by his civilization and disappears for a time presumably observing the sights of Paris. He returns to his master’s apartment just as John is preparing to leave for a gallery that will be displaying his African paintings for the first time. Babu is convinced that John is Christ and that he, Babu, must kill him. He reasons that since white men had to kill their god to achieve such a magnificent civilization, so Babu must kill his master to achieve the same results.

-You test Babu like you test Jew that time. Jew, he no believe. White man kill you and prove you God. Then you rose from dead in three days and you make white man powerful. Now it’s black man’s turn!

-You maniac! Take your hand . . . off my . . . beard . . . You’re hurting my neck!-
-Babu prove God!

-You’re mad!

-Babu cry . . . But Babu got faith . . . BABU STRONG!

-NAW! TURN ME LOOSE! DOOOOOON’T . . . (189)

The artist pleads with him—but to no avail; Babu proceeds sanguinely about his task. Babu murders for an intellectual reason and gets away with it. The scene shifts to two Paris detectives who are discovered discussing a baffling murder that had occurred some five years ago. They are convinced that John must have been killed by his Odile Dufour jealous mistress and laughingly dismiss the claims of a primitive superstitious black boy whom they had shipped back to Africa shortly after the crime. John’s wife Elsie is still living in Paris. Jacques, one of the detectives feels that Mrs. Franklin (Elsie) had nothing to do with her husband’s murder, as she was at the exhibition amidst thousand people gathered there. Jacques felt that both Mrs. Franklin (Elsie) and the African boy Babu had no motive for such a crime. Jacques is convinced that it was the artist Franklin’s mistress Odile Dufour in her jealous rage must have beheaded him. Thus the detectives enough evidence for the case to be reopened.

“The Man Who Killed a Shadow” was the first of Wright’s works to be published after he had gone to Paris. The story, which in some ways hearkens back to Native Son, deals with Saul Saunders, a Negro who inadvertently kills Maybelle Eva Houseman a white woman. Saul Saunders was a native of a small Southern town some mile away from the nation’s capital, Washington. From his childhood he was used to living with “subtler shadows” (193), “the shadows of his fears” (193). The town he lived in was divided into two, a white and black one separated from the blacks by the strict Jim Crow laws Saul’s
father and mother had died even before his young mind could form a clear image of them. People were never real to him, they were just “symbols of uneasiness” (194). He always lived with the feeling that “some invisible, unexplainable event was about to descend upon him” (194). He had five brothers and two sisters, it was his lot to live with grandmother.

It was quite normal in his black surroundings for Saul at the age of fourteen to be in the third grade when his grandmother was no more Saul started working for the white people and the shadow like quality grew into unimaginable proportions. “Soon all of Saul’s anxieties, fears, and irritations became focused upon this white shadow-world which gave him his daily bread in exchange for his labor” (195). At the age of fifteen Saul realized that there was no escape from “his plaguing sense of unreality”. It was not all difficult when he was with black friends and as he grew older his fear of the shadow world grew with him. It was by chance that he took to drinking and it helped to banish his fears, “It did not even bother him when he heard that if you were alone with a white woman and she screamed, it was as good as hearing your death sentence, for, though you had done nothing, you would be killed” (196).

When he was thirty years old he got married to a pretty girl, he felt that he was in control of his anxiety about the shadow world. He had held many jobs, as a chauffeur and butler to an old white army colonel and was paid about twenty dollars every two weeks. Next he was working as an exterminator by a big chemical company, when he spoke up to his boss defending himself, he was sent away.

He was hired as the janitor in the National Cathedral a church and religious institution. The work was less cumbersome, he reported for duty each morning at seven o’ clock. He was responsible for the cleanliness of the Christmas card shop, library and
the choir room. The library was situated in a separate building and their rows and rows of books in it. The librarian was “a strange little shadow woman who stared at him all the time in a most peculiar way” (198). Maybelle Eva Houseman the librarian is a forty year old, sexually repressed, white woman who commands the Negro Saul Saunders to look at her legs. His boss has warned him not to get in her way at any cost. “She’s a crackpot” (198). That day when he was busy cleaning the library Maybelle called him as a “‘black nigger’” (201) and ordered, him to lean under her desk. She was seated with her knees sprawled apart and her dress was drawn halfway up her legs.

This “supreme humiliation of black people” (201) forced him to slap her hard across her face, she started screaming continuously, the screams unnerved him. “In her scream . . . he felt again in one rush of emotion all the wild and bitter tales he had heard of how whites always got the black who did a crime and this woman was screaming as though he had raped her” (202). If she had stopped screaming, he would have escaped, he wanted to make sure that she would not scream again. “He was not reacting to the woman, but to the feelings that her screams evoked in him” (203). Weeks later in the court white he was being accused of premeditated robbery and murder, he gently surrendered to the world of shadows which always haunted him, at least the tension went from him, self, realization dawned on and peace set in.

What makes the story something other than a restatement of the Bigger Thomas theme is Wright’s use of the Negro as a symbol of libidinal abandon. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that Saul Saunders is as much a shadow of a man, as the woman he kills is a shadow of a woman. Like the underground man he lives on a plane of fear, guilt, and dread. Hence the Negro and white woman are not only shadows to one another, but shadows to themselves.
The fifties saw Wright experimenting with new subject matter and new forms. Problems of race remain the central issue, but are now dealt with from changing perspectives. For the first time there are two stories with non-American settings, and race neurosis is treated more as the white man’s dilemma than as the black man’s burden. It is clear that Wright was trying to broaden the range and scope of his fiction that he was trying to move away somewhat from the psyche of the oppressed Negro peasant or proletariat toward characters of varying social and ethnic backgrounds.

The hero Saul Saunders was affected by a plaguing sense of unreality because he feared the white community from his childhood. It affected him psychologically. He was in worse trouble than any black man could ever imagine. It is this fever of shadows of the whites which led him to kill the white woman, MayBelle Eva Houseman, whose name he was not even aware of until the day of judgment.

This story reveals how the Negro is treated by the white people. Here racism is in the form of sexual abuse, slavery, domination of the whites, accusation because of colour, thirst for freedom and mental trauma is highlighted. Racism played an important role in the white country.

Wright’s two other representations of the forties are partial reflections of “Underground Man.” “The Man Who Went to Chicago,” might have been taken from Black Boy. The concluding story shows why it was almost inevitable that Richard Wright should have joined the Communist Party in his youth, just as his own honesty made it inevitable that he should have left that party when he encountered its opposition to the intellectual freedom which he always sought.

“The Man Who Went to Chicago,” an autobiographical study, where Wright presents:
The essence of the irony of the plight of the Negro in America, to me, is that he is doomed to live in isolation, while those who condemn him seek the basest goals of any people on the face of the earth. Perhaps it would be possible for the Negro to become reconciled to his plight if he could be made to believe that his suffering were for some remote, high, sacrificial end; but sharing the culture that condemns him and seeing that a lust for trash is what binds the nation to his claims, is what set storms rolling in his soul. (222)

Wright crossed the boundary line of the Black Belt hoping to find a job in the white territory. He was employed as a porter by Mr. Hoffman, a Jew. The work was easy but to his dismay their thick accent put him off. It was not only did the protagonist realize that he had not understood the motives and intentions of Mrs & Mr. Hoffman, he had failed to learn the skill of finding his way through these confusing racial relations. “The idea of racial discrimination” (213) dismayed him, in the North he was not counted as a human being, even living under a dictatorship would have contributed meaning to his existence. The awareness of “Color-hate” (213) being a significant part of American culture made him experience not only the hatred of the whites this “grew in turn to hate in himself that which others hated in him” (213), so each day would be spent in redeeming himself from unruly emotions towards himself and others.

Held at bay by the hate of others, preoccupied with his own feelings, he was continuously at war with reality. He became inefficient, less able to see and judge the objective world. And when he reached that state, the white people looked at him and laughed and said: “Look, didn’t I tell you niggers were that way?” (214)
Gradually he mastered the mechanism of repressing the hopes that the Chicago streets, the newspapers, the media was evoking in him, of dwelling on nothing, “of being hated without reason. A dim notion. . .” (215). Their story when he took leave for attending the examination of a postal clerk, he lied to Mr. Hoffman. Mr Hoffman treated him as an equal, inspite seeing through his deception. “All vight, zay and vork,” Mr. Hoffman said. “I know you’re lying, but I don’t care, Rich” (217). He quit the job because he felt he had done wrong, his emotional status as a black man failed to make him, understand that he was working for kind people.

His job as a dishwasher in a North Side cafe amidst several white waitresses made him keenly aware that they were relatively free of “the heritage of racial hate” (218). The problem of being a Negro lay in the psychological distance that separated people of different races.

Culturally the Negro represents a paradox: though he is an organic part of the nation, he is excluded by the entire tide and direction of American culture. Frankly, it is felt to be right to exclude him, and it is felt to be wrong to admit him freely. Therefore if, within the confines of its present culture, the nation ever seeks to purge itself of its color hate, it will find itself at war with itself, convulsed by a spasm of emotional and moral confusion. (221)

What separated Wright from these white girls with whom he worked with was not race or color but the everyday values that contributed to the meaning of a Negro’s life. Even though Wright had left the South, the Jim Crow laws that had been imbued in never allowed him to freely express nor allow himself to enter into any relationships with the
whites. After a temporary vacancy in the post office, he faced unemployment again. The effect of the Depression was seen in the Chicago’s Southside.

Wright’s cousin who was the Superintendent for a Negro burial Society offered him as an agent of selling insurance policies to Negroes. During this time he experienced how the Negroes “exploited the ignorance of their black customers” (227). Wright learnt how Negroes in Chicago lived, most of the policy holders were illiterates and lived in dungy flats. Many a poor housewife or young unmarried mothers were ready to accommodate him in order to escape from paying a ten cent premium. Some of the black agents were vicious if a sick black woman had the right to claim her policy, she would be forced to submit to the sexual demands of the agent.

At the relief station, something new was happening. The Negroes who were waiting in the office were sharing their life experiences with each other “... for the first time, their talking was enabling them to sense the collectivity of their lives, and some of their fear was passing” (234). Wright realized that what the Communists predicted was coming true. This collectivity of Negroes was the beginnings of anarchy. “The Man Who Went To Chicago” clearly presents the racial discrimination which they suffer from. They were denied of their birth right and they cannot claim America as their native land.

My knowledge of how Negroes react to their plight makes me declare that no man can possibly be individually guilty of treason, that an insurgent act is but a man’s desperate answer to those who twist his environment so that he cannot fully share the spirit of his native land. Treason is a crime of the State. (236)

Wright was assigned by the relief system as an orderly to a medical research institute in one of the well known hospitals in Chicago. “The sharp line of racial division
drawn by the hospital” (237) dawng on him at the first instance. Four of the Negroes Bill, Brand, Cooke and Wright were in charge of cleaning operating rooms, dogs, rats, mice, cats and rabbits and feed guinea pigs. They were restricted to their work area in the basement and prevented from relating with white nurses, doctors or other workers. Wright realized that was the same of all Negro men and women working at the institute.

Guilt and fear like some crazy quilt pattern themselves through his work. It is interesting because Wright here has chosen to depict himself living literally in an underground situation. One of Wright’s first jobs after coming to Chicago was that of a hospital attendant. He had a number of menial tasks one of which took him to the hospital basement to feed caged animals on whom certain experimental inoculations were being performed. On one occasion two of the other Negro attendants with whom Wright worked began to fight, and in the course of their quarrel pushed against and fell among some of the cages, thereby setting free some of the animals. The resulting chaos of violence, animals and men in the cluttered basement comes to symbolize the true heartbeat of the civilization in which the hospital stands as such a deceptive example.

“The Man Who Went to Chicago” reveals his philosophy and outlook on life. This story describes the hardships of a migrant worker who comes from South to North. The protagonist is the author himself. He briefly explains his job experiences and talks about the difference between the Blacks and other Asians.

I was persisting in reading my present environment in the light of my old one. I reasoned thus: though English was my native tongue and America my native land, she, an alien, could operate a store and earn a living in a neighbourhood where I could not even live. I reasoned further that she aware of this and was trying to protect her position against me. (212)
Each and every line of this story highlights racial discrimination which the blacks suffer because of their colour. This colour discrimination lead them to design their own identity, ethical values, and loyalty amidst all harassments that subjugated them for more than three hundred years. This may be a perfect lived experience of existentialist philosophy, in terms of his character who would be much more inclined to believe that the only chance of reconciliation to his plight is the belief that it will one day end.

Unlike the pieces in Uncle Tom’s Children, these stories are not arranged along any progressively thematic lines; instead the order in which they are assembled indicates that Wright was more concerned with showing a variety of styles, settings and points of view. To be sure, they all deal in one way or another with Negro oppression. With one exception “The Man Who Lived Underground” they are considerably shorter than the pieces in Uncle Tom’s Children.

It is instructive to note in this respect that the general pattern of plot and action in “Man Almost a Man” anticipates a similar pattern in Wright’s novel, Native Son, that would be published later the same year. Like the pieces in Uncle Tom’s Children, much of the narrative is carried chiefly by dialogue and interior monologue. This is the last fictional work employing a southern setting that would be published until his Mississippi novel eighteen years later. This story too marks the end of one phase of Wright’s development. Uncle Tom’s Children and Eight Men have much in common. Both are illustrative of the flaming talent which burst on the American scene in 1937 and did more than any other fiction to awaken this country to the cruelties of race discrimination.

The origin of his humorous and imaginative “Man of All Works”, “The Man Who Killed a Shadow” actually comes from the Julius Fischer ease, which attorney Charles E. Houston had related to Wright shortly before his departure for France. Wright secured a
transcript and nearly contented him with narrating it; describing, for instance, the way the defendant had strangled and clubbed with a stick a librarian Catherine Cooper Reardon, because she had complained about his work. “The Man Who Killed A Shadow” and The Long Dream to be corroborated with the fear of the protagonist a black being accused of rape and being lynched when he is found in the presence of a white woman.

Other fictional confrontations are only in some way variations of this situation where the black man is put in danger by the white woman. The reaction of the white woman is infallible: she holds back her breath before crying, and the cry, when it is uttered, sounds like an inhuman howl signing the black’s death warrant. “The Man Who killed a Shadow” offers the most typical example of this:

She sucked in her breath, sprang up, and stepped away from him. Then she screamed sharply, and her voice was like a lash cutting into his chest. She screamed again and he backed away from her. He felt helpless, strange. . .

In her scream he heard the sirens of the police cars that hunted down black men. . . This woman was screaming as though he had raped her. (201-202)

The same reaction occurs in “The Man Who Lived Underground” when the office-worker perceives Daniels: “He tiptoed to a door and eased it open. A fair-haired white girl stood in front of a steel cabinet, her blue eyes wide upon him. She turned chalky and gave a high-pitched scream” (50). In “The Man Who Lived Underground” Wright never uses his hero as a mouth piece against the industrial society he escapes the outside world by accident and wishes to return. Fred Daniels sees his exclusion more as an opportunity to scrutinize his culture from the outside. He prefers to stay away for the duration of the story in the same way as Cross Damon when accidentally liberated from the past. Both Fred Daniels and Cross have many features and details in common, their
existentialist philosophy, the symbolic role of the church; the theme of the innocent
victim, the criminal who needs the policeman, and their deep resemblance; and above all,
man’s feeling of horror when, like Kurt, in Heart of Darkness, he examples the depths of
his soul and his mortal state.

The identity that Daniels was seeking was neither personal nor racial but rather a
definition of man as a member of the human family. Here the protagonist’s race most
certainly plays a vital role in the plot. If his colour had not been dark, Daniels would not
have been arrested and falsely accused and at the end, the policeman would not have
treated him in such a scornful manner. This collection *Eight Men* presents the humanist
message that man acquires his identity from other men, owing to its splendid polyphony
of meanings and its balanced precision may be said to represent Wright’s richest short
pieces powerfully in the texture of existentialism.
Chapter V

Conclusion

The dissertation has argued the search for reintegration of the excluded black American in select works of Richard Wright. After reading Mencken, Wright realises that words could be used as weapons to seek justice. This is clearly evident in Wright's own career, as a successful black writer emerging during a period of racial oppression and economic hardship. The dissertation has proved that in his entire writing career Wright has produced twelve books two were published posthumously and each, despite Wright’s shifting political and philosophical positions, picks up one or another of the main strands of the theme of reintegration of the excluded black American. Wright embodied in his own life much that is apparently contradictory in his works. Wright’s history echoes the excluded Negro’s history in microcosm, in that it spans the years of southern feudalism, the northern urban migration, and the international arena of black African politics.

His work thus constituted an inquiry. Wright’s persistence in his investigation of Western society was an important factor contributing to the achievement of a certain consistency in his work. An artist, an essayist, a critic, a political activist, it is clear that he arranged and rearranged many times the elements making up the phenomenological display of Western development.

Wright was as much a political activist as he was a novelist. But this is not to imply that he sacrificed art for art’s sake or politics for art. He was concerned with the human condition and he chose diverse arenas in which to engage in the battle to improve humanity. While Addison Gayle and Michel Fabre emphasize the political and literary influences on Wright’s life, Margret Walker Alexander’s forthcoming The Daemonic Genius of Richard Wright is a psychological biography that addresses those elements of