Chapter IV

Outsiderness: An Adsorption!
In *The Outsider* the protagonist's will to shape his destiny is extraordinarily portrayed. Cross Damon's elevation to a member of the local cell of the Communist Party in New York is significant in his unleashing of the black power. Wright struggled so hard to complete this novel that it remained essentially an intriguing philosophic exercise. The intellectual problems posed by a man who seeks liberation from all human bonds and who plays God with disastrous consequences form the thematic concern of the novel. *Native Son* is a prelude to *The Outsider* in which Cross Damon longs for individual freedom.

*The Outsider* is the result of Wright's post-war effort to find a philosophy to replace the Communism that he had rejected in 1942. His realization that Communism is nothing but lust for naked power makes him believe in nothing and he feels that he is an outsider in America for his black skin. Further he feels that he is much more than an outsider and that existence is senseless and human beings are nothing in particular. *The Outsider* bears its genesis to the three major general preoccupations of Wright: his disillusionment with the materialism and racial discrimination of American culture, the failure of Communism, and the shock of the explosion of the atomic bomb. Wright required a global vision that would rise
above the precincts of race and nation. Although *The Outsider*
has a black American protagonist who feels oppressed by
American capitalism and racism, the novel’s concern is more
with the human condition in the modern world than with race
relations in the United States. Wright maintained that the hero
of the novel could have been any colour:

The Outsider has a Negro for its hero; but it is not
primarily his plight as a Negro, but as a thinking,
questioning man in the perplexing twentieth century
that concerns Mr. Wright. And instead of a realistic,
sociological document he has written a philosophical
novel, its ideas dramatized by improbable
coincidences and symbolical characters.¹

The central theme of *The Outsider* is Cross Damon’s quest
for freedom: “I wanted to be free . . . to feel what I was worth”
(439). Yet at the end of the novel he admits that his discovery
yielded nothing. At first the protagonist feels existential nausea,
a sense of alienation. He accepts the view of an amoral universe
in which man is destined to become either an executioner or a
victim. The subway accident in which Damon is reported to have
been killed allows him to create a new life. But he discovers that
the egotistical exercise of freedom destroys those around him, including the one person he loves.

*The Outsider* explores the ideal of freedom but provides no hopeful answers. Society is shown based on pretence, human nature is portrayed as brutal, and the possibility of creating a meaningful sense of freedom seems remote. Since the novel is a novel of ideas with a host of problems—of freedom, dilemmas, ethics, morality, the paradox of racism in a democracy—characterization is subordinated to exposition. Hence all the characters are types, representatives of intellectual position. Wright attempts to reconcile himself with the profound feeling that man is fundamentally amoral and anarchistic. As the victim of physical and emotional duress, with a sense of dread, terror and guilt attached with birth, man is crushed under the weight of limits imposed by society. His sense of being insignificant is more haunting.

Cross Damon, a name suggesting inverted Christianity, is a metaphysical rebel, an ethical criminal who attempts to create the kind of life he feels he wants. Damon is a man who rejects traditional codes of behaviour. He reacts to his murders with cool analysis and shows no emotion when confronted with his wife and children or the news of his mother's death. On the other
hand, he is a man driven by “hot impulse,” egotistical desires that move him to murder and love.

Cross Damon, a 26 year old Negro, is a mail sorter on the night shift in a South Chicago Post office. As the novel opens, we find Cross drinking comprehensively against protest from his friends and co-workers. He drinks so much because, as he himself says, “My soul needs it” (2). Damon’s deterioration into a drunkard testifies Wright’s new philosophy of glorification of nothingness. If Bigger’s hatred is directed against the whites, Cross’s hatred is directed against not only society but against himself. Life’s monotony is the main reason.

Book I, “Dread,” relates the dilemma of Cross being pulled in three directions—his mother, his wife, Gladys, and his girl friend, Dot. Dot wants to exploit the situation to her own advantage when she becomes pregnant by him. She wants Cross to marry her or else she says she will initiate legal proceedings against him for assault and rape. Cross can not marry Dot unless he divorces Gladys, who never wants to release him. He feels that he has not loved her, perhaps never loved her. She has become for him an object of compassion. He is haunted by the idea of finding some way to make her hate him. Her hatred will
be a way of squaring their relationship, of setting her free as well as setting himself free.

He envisages a plan for getting rid of Gladys and sadistically slaps her. When he is asked to leave the house, he does so happily. Gladys is vindictive, bent upon exhausting his financial resources. She forces Cross to sign the house and car over to her and get the loan amount of eight hundred dollars from the post office. His mother is also disappointed with him: “To think I named you Cross after the Cross of Jesus,’ she moaned” (23).

Ironically, she doesn’t know that her son is also a scapegoat, not for the sins of mankind like Jesus, but for the lust of power. She is angry with Cross for seducing a little girl like Dot. She tells him that it is easy to fool a young girl and if he is proud of this cheap trick, he has fallen lower that she thought he had. She succeeds in evoking in him that shameful guilt born of desire and fear of desire. In the process, she is reminded of her own betrayed maidenhood. Cross sees in her an ethical mother when she warns him that he can not undo what he has done. He has sinned.
Cross in his quest for meaning and definition outside him bears the cross of metaphysical distress, compounded by Dot, Gladys and his mother. When he realizes that he has lost control of his life, his self-hatred swells. He feels that his life is a mess:

What a messy life he was living! It was crazy; it was killing him; it was senseless; and he was a fool to go on living it. What a stinking botchy he’d made out of every thing he had touched! Why? He didn’t know. I could be teaching school, he told himself. He’d dropped out of the university right after he’d married Gladys and after that nothing had gone right (11-12).

As Joe puts it, somebody said that the problem with Cross was his four A's, Alcohol, Abortions, Automobiles, and Alimony. Cross admits smilingly that the analogy is not bad. However, Cross’s rejection of materialistic values is symbolized by his throwing money from the eleventh floor of the post office. This reminds us of Fred Daniel of “The Man Who Lived Underground” rejecting American society by stealing only the unwanted items.

The image of the Negro as underground man had its origin in Wright’s personal experience. During the winter of 1932, he was employed by Chicago hospital to look after the experimental
animals. He and his fellow porters were confined to the basement corridors of the institution, restricted to what might be called an underground point of view:

The proposal kept us four Negroes as though were close kin to the animals we tended, huddled together down in the underworld corridors of the hospital, separated by a vast psychological distance from the significant processes of the rest of the hospital—just as America had kept us locked in the dark underworld of American life for three hundred years.

Cross accidentally gets an opportunity to start a new life. He is involved in a subway accident but escapes unhurt. He learns from a radio announcement that he is thought to be dead. Another passenger is mistaken for him. He wants to grab this unique chance to create a new existence:

He was dead . . . . All right . . . Okay . . . Why the hell not? Why should he refute it? Why should he deny it? He, of all the people on earth, had a million reasons for being dead and staying dead! An intuitive sense of freedom flashed through his mind. Was
there a slight chance here of his being able to start all over again? To live a new life? It would solve every problem he had if the world and all the people who knew him could think of him as dead . . . . (83)

All of his life he has been yearning for his personal freedom. And now freedom is knocking at his door, begging him to come in. This results in his loss of identity but he longs for it. Others take their lives for granted but Cross has to mould his with a conscious aim. He is endowed with perfect freedom to recreate himself anew and even tag it with a past that he likes most. He takes a room in a hotel to avoid being seen by others. He introduces himself as Charles Webb from Memphis. The woman at the reception tells him that he should not make any noise in the room like some people who get drunk and hurt others. Cross immediately replies that he really never hurt anybody in his life but himself: "Lady, I never really hurt anybody in my life but my self" (89).

Cross's funeral has been set for Monday afternoon at 3 p.m. at the church of the Good Shepherd. He laughs to himself. He is overcome by the images of his three sons who are his future self. And he has given up that future for the restricted but
more intense future. He sees his family attending his funeral and the funeral confirms his aloneness:

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, their hopes, their fears, and loves to buoy him up, but he was a man tossed back upon himself when that self meant only a hope of hope (101).

When he meets his friend Joe Thomas in the brothel-hotel, he is afraid of being revealed and kills him hitting on the head with a bottle. He is haunted by the fear of exposure that compels him to resort to violence. His sense of freedom is dictated by the dread. He leaves for New York in search of a new life, a new meaning for his recreated existence.

At the conclusion of Book I Cross thinks he is free but he is not. He is free from everything but himself. Wright describes his dread leading him to his destiny:

As the train wheels clicked through the winter night, he knew where his sense of dread came from; it was from within himself, within the vast and mysterious
world that was his and his alone, and yet not really 
known to him, a world that was his own and yet 
unknown. And it was into this strange but familiar 
world that he was now plunging. . . . (117)

In Book 2, “Dream,” Cross is in a dream with no identity 
and experiencing an unreal existence. The epigraph taken from 
Hart Crane is apt: As silent as a mirror is believed, realities 
plunge in silence by . . . . (118) On train to New York, he meets 
Bob Hunter, a waiter in the dining car, Ely Houston, a 
hunchback New York District attorney, and Father Selden. A 
minor accident that takes place in the dining car seals Cross’s 
fate. Bob spills coffee on a white woman customer who threatens 
to report him presuming that it is a deliberate act. The waiter 
seeks Cross’s help in making him a witness if that woman makes 
a trouble. Cross lies that his name is Addison Jordan and his 
address is 128 West 137th Street. When he speaks, he feels that 
he is speaking out of a dream. He presumes Hunter believes 
that he had his help and so he will be a friend. He has made 
Hunter a promise that he could not keep, just as he had made 
his mother, his sons, Dot, Gladys, and Jenny promises that he 
could not keep:
His nonidentity was making Hunter believe in the unreal. Cross sighed. He had to break out of this dream, or he would surely go mad. He had to be born again, come anew into the world. To live amidst others without an identity was intolerable (132).

Ely Houston's and Cross's discussions on the declining trend in the acceptance of traditional values of Christianity, reasons for developing disruptive tendencies to break the law, and the difference between an ordinary criminal and an ethical criminal, who thinks that the world is chaotic and meaningless, reveal that they are similar in their views. Cross opines that all cultures and civilizations are just screens used by men to divide themselves and all of man’s efforts are an attempt to still man’s fear of himself. To Houston’s question that what man is that he has to hide from himself, Cross replies,

May be man is nothing in particular. . . . May not human life on this earth be a kind of frozen fear of man at what he could possibly be? And every move he makes, couldn't these moves be just to hide this awful fact? To twist it into something which he feels would make him rest and breathe a little easier. What
man is, is pathos too much to be borne by man . . . .

(135-36)

One can notice that Wright has taken words and phrases like "ethical criminals" verbatim from Camus' *Essays*. Since likeness leads to repulsion, possibly Cross hates Ely Houston. However, Houston is struck by Cross's insight and intelligence in particular by his remark: "Man is nothing in particular" (135).

After reaching New York, Cross assumes a new identity, that of Lionel Lane, a man who died recently. He procures Lane's duplicate birth certificate and draft card to make himself safe by assuming the guise of a "darkie." He is introduced to the White Communists Gil and his painter wife, Eva Blount. Book 2 closes with Cross accepting Gil's invitation to live with them. Cross is a spiritual wreck when he assumes the identity of Lane. While procuring the birth certificate, he suffers the real existence of a Negro in a superior racial set-up. However, he grapples with the fact that Negroes can also exist without a name and a place. He is very much upset at the behaviour of Sarah and Bob when they make him feel about his face:

Cross had had the illusion of feeling at home with these outsiders, but now he felt himself being pushed
more than ever into that position where he looked at
others as though they weren't human. He could have
waved his hand and blotted them from existence with
no more regret than if he were swatting a couple of
insects (171).

In Book 3, "Descent," Cross comes to know that Eva is
also an outsider like him but an involuntary one. To her the
world is either Party or anti-Party, and nothing in between
counts. Cross secretly reads Eva's diary and finds out that Gil,
an objective worker, married Eva, a nonobjective painter, only for
political reasons. Blount was ordered by the party to marry Eva
because it would add prestige to the Party. Gil's betrayal of Eva
confirms Cross's suspicion that the Party is concerned
exclusively with power. He realizes that the driving force behind
Communism is a lust for naked power. He feels outraged at the
Communists' cynical exploitation of men's dreams and anxieties.
The Party is crowded with many such victims, the latest being
himself, a wonderful recruit, a fugitive from the Southern racists
for the Party. Eva knows Cross is living under an assumed name
but considers him a Negro intellectual and a victim like herself.

Herndon, the Negro hating landlord, warns Cross to leave
the place. Gil, on being informed, visits the landlord the same
evening and in the ensuing fight between Blount and the landlord, Cross intervenes only to kill them both. Gil while dying falls towards a fireplace that reminds us of the Daltons’ furnace in *Native Son*. “Gil trembled for a split second, then fell headlong toward the fireplace, where flames danced and cast wild red shadows over the walls” (226). Cross feels that he has destroyed both the gods who otherwise would have enslaved him but in the process he has made a little god of himself. In this sensational double murder, he gains more fulfilments.

In Book 4, “Despair,” realization dawns upon Cross. In the process of eliminating monsters, he himself has emerged out as the monster. The police also reluctantly jump to the conclusion that Gil and Herndon killed each other. When Cross meets Ely Houston, he says that a person for whom Western values and traditions have no meaning is hard to imagine. Houston’s investigation of the murders of Gil and Herndon shows that the writer followed the conventions of the detective story. The love affair of Cross and Eva adds another dimension. Cross becomes more and more entangled with Eva. Eva mistakenly sympathizes with Cross and Cross too wants to protect her from the vultures like himself. With Gil gone, Eva is again an orphan.
She is already his in a deeper sense than mere sexual sense, in a sense that includes the sexual. He can ravage her entire being without any resistance from her. From his secret reading of her diary he already possesses a comprehensive view of her existence. He knows that he loves her and he wants to tell her what he knows of terror and hopelessness. He feels the presence of a barrier not of race but of mutual guilt, blood, and false identity.

However, Cross's despair is compounded when he learns that Hilton, a high ranking Communist has secret information that Gil was killed by Cross. He goes to his hotel room and after a long talk on the nature of man, life, and politics, he shoots Hilton. Before his death, Hilton remarks:

Sweep your illusions aside, Lane. Get down to what is left, and that is: life, life; bare, naked, unjustifiable life; just life existing there and for no reason and no end. The end and the reason are for us to say, to project. That's all (300).

Cross justifies his killing Jack Hilton on many counts. It may be to avenge Bob's betrayal and Sarah's indignation; it may be a consolation to Eva's deceived heart; it is mainly to get rid of
that sense of outrage Hilton's attitude has evoked in him. Further, he knows that he will surely be caught and he doesn't want to bother about it as he is already lost. At this critical juncture Cross contemplates eliminating Eva also. He can justify the killing of Gil, Herndon and Hilton as they have outraged his sense of existence but not the killing of Eva. Logic sustained by love makes him spare Eva. When he confesses his murders she thinks that he is delirious. His monstrousness shocks her and she commits suicide. Thus as he tries to destroy totalitarianism, he develops in himself tyrannical tendencies. Houston's reaction to the fourth murder by Cross is vividly portrayed:

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 as we do, and yet living on a completely different plane? A man who would be the return of ancient man, pre-Christian man? Do you know what I mean? (316)

Cross is suspected by the police as well as the Communists. He is interrogated by Blimin regarding his views
and who he is. Cross's response about fourteen pages reminds us of Max's defence in *Native Son*. Blimin can not tolerate Cross's reducing the noble aims of Lenin to a power-hungry man. Cross tells him that he has no intention of opposing the Communist doctrine and stresses the need to fight the capitalist on other than ideological and economic grounds. He is surprised that Americans are captured by the mindless materialism:

> The only real enemies of [the] system . . . are those outsiders who are conscious of what is happening and seek to change the consciousness of [those] . . . being controlled. . . . The essence of life today is psychological; men may take power with arms, but their keeping of it is by other means (362-63).

Book 5, "Decision," with an unlikely conclusion offers Wright's conception of Cross by summarizing Cross's predicament. Friedrich Nietzsche's line "Man is the only being who makes promises" is reflected all through the section. Ely Houston tells Cross that his true identity is being investigated and he is sure that Cross is the murderer. His evidence being psychological, he feels that Cross's intellectual and philosophical inclination could be the motivating force. Cross remains unmoved and neither confirms nor denies the charges. When Ely
Houston informs Cross that his mother is dead, he notices only indifference in him.

Ely is shocked at the heartlessness of the suspect. He refuses to acknowledge his wife and his three sons, Cross Junior, Robert, and Peter who are summoned there. This is the worst kind of confrontation he ever has had in his life time which he has not even dreamt of. But Cross maintains his iron reserve. He is torn between sentiments subverting him and Houston trying to crows over him. Before his eyes the frightened boys, flesh of his flesh, await his acknowledgement. They are the future of his self that he rejected long ago. Houston asks Gladys to recognize her husband and Gladys shakes her head negatively rejecting Cross’s presence in the world. Houston is astonished and asks again. Gladys finally nods her head affirmatively. Houston is waiting for Cross to do a fatal mistake. But Cross remains impassionate. He thinks that a person who is not bound by the Western institutions such as religion or the family is capable of committing any type of crime.

He further warns him that Communists are persuading him to charge him with the murder of Blount, Herndon, and Hilton. Cross says that they are suspicious and frightened of him. Further, Houston says that there is another motive to the
murder, his desire to have Mrs. Blount. Cross frankly replies that before Gil died, he never touched his wife nor did he look at her with desire in his eyes. He was living in a different apartment when Gil died, and took Eva to Harlem to keep her away from the press. He leaves no evidence against him in his words or acts and walks out to see Eva. Eva is returning from Party's office after battling to protect him from the accusations. They say she is wrong and he is guilty. He confesses everything to Eva which he couldn't do to the district attorney. He longs to build himself anew, create afresh but this proves fatal and Eva commits suicide.

Finally Ely Houston explains to Cross how he has solved the mystery of his case and found out that he is Cross Damon, a multiple murderer. He gets the clue from Eva's diary but the first real clue is from the list of the titles of the books he left in his room in Chicago:

Your Nietzsche, your Hegel, your Jaspers, your Heidegger, your Husserl, your Kierkegaard, and your Dostoevski were the clues . . . . I said to myself that we were dealing with a man who had wallowed in guilty thought. But the more I pondered this thing,
the sorrier I felt for you. I began to feel as though I'd killed Blount, Hendon, and Hilton myself (421).

Talking about the inhumanity of Cross Damon, Houston says that Cross has disproved the sociologists that the American Negro has had no time to become completely adjusted to the Whites' mores. But with Cross, he is adjusted. He has grown beyond organized religion and the rituals. His indifference to his family proves that either he has the emotional capacity or lacks any emotion to commit a crime.

Boy, you killed your mother long, long ago. . . . And when you saw those three fine sons of yours! They tugged at your heart and memory and you were wildly angry and ashamed; but you rode out that too; you overcame it. And I said to myself: 'This man could have killed Blount, Herndon, and Hilton. Only he could have done it. He has the emotional capacity—or lack of it!' to do it' (422).

When Houston finds that Cross is beyond the pale of the little feelings, the humble feelings, the human feelings, he concludes that he can do anything. He does this not with the sole intention of establishing social justice or saving falling
mankind and not in a towering rage but just because he happens to feel like that one day. But irony is that Cross has seen through all the ideologies, pretences, frauds, but has not seen through himself.

Houston leaves Cross to his own punishment in the absence of perfect evidence. He is going to let him keep this guilt in his heart until his end. And Cross is sure to punish himself as he is his own law and judge. Later Cross moves out alone into the streets of Harlem. He notices that he is followed by the Communists who intend to kill him. He is shot dead either by Menti, Hank or both of them. Prior to his death he whispers to Houston:

Don’t think I’m so odd and strange . . . I’m not . . . . I’m legion. . . . I’ve lived alone, but I’m everywhere. Man is returning to the earth. . . . For a long time he has been sleeping, wrapped in a dream . . . . He is awakening now, awakening from his dream and finding himself in a waking nightmare (439-40).

When asked why he chose to live the way he did, Cross says, “I wanted to be free . . . to feel what I was worth . . . . What living meant to me. . . . I loved life too . . . much . . . .” (439)
To Houston’s question how his life was with him, Cross manages to get his reluctant breath form into words: “It . . . it was . . . horrible. . . . Because in my heart . . . I'm . . . I felt . . . I'm innocent . . . . That’s what made the horror. . . .” (440) We may agree with Katherine Fishburn, who says:

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. He holds himself innocent— even at death. ³

Cross is an elaboration of Bigger Thomas, another urban demon whose life meant nothing. For Book 1, “Dread,” Wright’s epigraph is from Kierkegaard showing his interest in existentialism. “Dread is an alien power which lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself away, nor has a will to do so; for one fears what one desires” (1).

“Dread” is the watchword of the German Existentialist Martin Heidegger. Dread leads to despair, and “Despair” is the title of the penultimate book of the novel. Cross is aware that his dread was his mother’s first fateful gift to him. He was born of
her not only physically but emotionally too. When he was a child he was made to feel by his mother that he was a fragile object that had to be protected against imminent threat of annihilation. His mother, without knowing it, created such a world for him to live in. Though she loved him, she tainted his growth with a fierce devotion born of fear of a life that had baffled and wounded her.

The protagonist longs for the existential leap crossing all the barriers - social, political, religious, and moral - only to learn that conventions alone make one human. Cross Damon (crucified demon) begins his life with a sense of dread and ends up in despair; a characteristic trait of the black men, the outsiders who are nothing. But being an outsider, Cross possesses an undaunted spirit that refuses to be tamed. He says that it is not because he is a Negro that he has found his obligations intolerable but because down deep in his heart a sense of freedom is all pervasive.

The novel The Outsider seems to say that in seeking freedom man becomes an enslaver of others. Cross says to Houston while dying: "I wish I could ask men to meet themselves . . . . We're different from what we seem . . . . May be worse, may be better . . . . But certainly different. We are strangers to
ourselves" (439). Further, there is a warning in the novel that total freedom is as dangerous as a totally enslaved person like Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*.

Some critics feel that Cross’s philosophy is based not on his being a Negro but on his individual thinking and experiences. There is no racial tone in his actions and reactions. He was just a man, any man who had had an opportunity to flee and had seized upon it. But racial resentments seem to have contributed to the making of Cross’s psychology and philosophy. His mother, a product of Mississippi racism and southern Negro piety, injected the dread into his soul. Gladys, his wife, substantiates this with her account of how her mother was brutally mistreated by a White. Bob’s wife doesn’t go to church as she doesn’t want to kneel before a White. Communists too attempt to seduce Cross by their promises of racial revenge.

Cross Damon remains an outsider in finding out the answer to a profound question—what is man? In his “aloneness,” he tries to relate himself to himself which is the beginning of the main thread of Existential philosophy as seen in the following lines of Kierkegaard:
Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The Self is a relation which relates itself to its own self or it is that (which accounts for it) that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but (consists in the fact) that the relation relates itself to its own self.

It is a great solace that Cross utters on his deathbed, "Never alone . . . . Alone a man is nothing. . . . Man is a promise that he must never break. . . ." (439)

Like Cross, Ely Houston is also an outsider. He says that his damned hump has given him more psychological knowledge than all the books he read at the university:

My deformity made me free; it put me outside and made me feel as an outsider. It wasn't pleasant; hell, no. at first I felt inferior. But now I have to struggle with myself to keep from feeling superior to the people I meet. . . . Do you understand what I mean?" (133)

Houston's analytical mind throws light on the criminality of human nature when Cross asks for the proof of his killings. Houston teases Cross by his interpolations:
Only men full of criminal feelings can create a
criminal code . . . Men who fear drink want laws
passed against drinking. Men who cannot manage
their sexual appetites launch crusades against vice. .
. . Lane, we're outsiders and we can understand
these new twentieth-century outlaws, for in our
hearts we are outlaws too. (283)

Like Boris Max in *Native Son*, Ely Houston is the mouth­
piece of Richard Wright. Through him, Wright presents his own
philosophy. Wright’s craftsmanship is superb in the portrayal of
Ely and Cross’s discussions in the beginning and Ely’s trial at
the end dealing with socio-economic, political, moral, ethical,
and psychological issues.

Further, Wright presents the Communists’ lust for naked
power and the way they control the individuals the units and on
the whole the working system for the sustenance of their power.
Hilton asks Bob to follow the altered decision of the party and
threatens him he will be disciplined if doesn’t follow it. He says:
“And the party will blacklist you throughout the labor movement.
The party will kill you, you can’t fight the Party. Understand
that?” (182)
The philosophy is so perplexing that it is not easy to be a Communist. In being a Communist one has to negate oneself, blotting out one's personal life and listening only to the voice of the party. Cross wonders why the Party demands abject obedience. After witnessing Bob's turmoil, he doubts whether Gil is another Hilton. He recalls Bob's having told him that the Party is obeyed it will take the role of mother and father but if disobeyed, it will destroy him. He relates this to the working patterns of the Nazis. People at the helm of affairs are governed by "man's desire to be a god." The real heart of communism is the will to power. He thinks of Gils and Hiltons:

How far wrong most people were in their appraisal of dictators! The popular opinion was that these men were hankering for their pick of beautiful virgins, good food, fragrant cigars, aged whisky, land, gold... It was power, not just the exercise of bureaucratic control, but personal power to be wielded directly upon the lives and bodies of others. (198-199)

The crux of the party's attitude is Cross's relationship with Eva and Cross is aware of this. Eva's despair and disillusionment with the Party are obvious:
With me, I believed in the Party, all they told me . . . .
Then I found that it was make-believe . . . . I can’t
even now tell you what they did to me . . . . They’ve
ruined me, my life, my work. . . . I’m filled with
shame and I want to hide . . . . Where can I hide,
Lionel?” (287)

Eva’s character is marked with irony. Afraid of deception,
she embraces a fount of deception. Full of timid, feminine desire
she flings her arms about a furnace of desire and is consumed in it.

During Blimin’s interrogation Cross comes out with his
philosophy, reflective of Wright’s disillusionment with the
explosion of atomic bomb during World War II. Cross asks
whether atom bombs can correct man’s sense of life. Wars will
but tear away the last shreds of belief, leaving man’s heart more
naked and compulsive than ever before. The essence of life
today is psychological and the public consciousness is the key to
political power.

Edward Margolies says about the fineness of the subject of
the novel, The Outsider. “Cross’s character and situation—the
alienated, aloof, and contemptuous Negro intellectual, mired in a
slough of depressing, sordid, near-hopeless circumstances—is a subject worthy of a fine novel.”

Wright’s views on Communist ideology find an expression in the novel. When Blimin accuses Cross of sneering at their ideology and of finding no difference between Russia and the imperialist powers, Cross says that Communism has two faces. He condemns people like Blimin and others for their doing in tune with the dictums of the party that launch any body on the road to naked power and to be caught in a trap. Ironically, Cross himself is caught in the trap when his will to power in search of freedom clashes with that of the Communists.

Cross Damon, displays courage, conviction and intellectual as well as emotional appeal. Even at death also he is firm and feels that he is innocent. All the killings whether they are intended or unintended are purged when Cross leaves the message to the humanity that it should not tread the path he has trodden as it has led to nothing.

The glorification of nothingness is no good. The sense of alienation is not innate but it is tempered by various factors. The redemption lies in the restoration of normalcy. Cross has snapped the ties that bound him; one requires courage to free
oneself from the restrictions imposed by the environment. Cross has no party, no myths, no traditions, no race, no soil, no culture, and no ideas except the idea of eternal freedom. He belongs to no organization and subscribes to no political philosophy. But at the end, he longs for the company and prescribes to essentially humanitarian philosophy.

Richard Wright portrays Cross Damon's character on diverse counts, each analysis gaining significance for its intense logic. The writer's success lies that the reader becomes one with the protagonist and initiates the progression. Absorption is an act of absorbing: entire occupation of mind. But adsorption remains on the surface only. Cross Damon's outsiderness is an adsorption. He is an outsider for others but not to himself.

Unlike Wright's earlier books, The Outsider did not prove to be a complete critical success. The Washington Post said, "It exasperates and abrades—but . . . it may be for its readers nearly as important a book as it was for its author." Granville Hicks in the New York Times Book Review likened the novel to Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, adding that Wright's book "is easy to disagree with, impossible to disregard." Other reviewers felt that Wright himself had become too much of an outsider; he had
lived too long outside the United States to write convincingly about it.\textsuperscript{6}

The hero of the \textit{The Outsider} is intended as a symbol of contemporary man. His central traits are rootlessness and amorality.

Wright makes a virtue out of rootlessness, to conceive of the human condition as a kind of cosmic exile. Himself an exile, twice removed from Mississippi soil, he responded by exulting in his fate, by glorifying heroes who are cut off from the past and dependent on the self alone. Wright explores these themes in \textit{The Outsider}.\textsuperscript{7}

Wright wanted to make \textit{The Outsider} a book “one can read feeling the moment and rhythm of a man alive and confronting the world with all its strength.”\textsuperscript{8} Wright attempts to resolve “the dilemma of the individual versus society, the mind versus materialism”\textsuperscript{9} in this novel. “Cross Damon is someone you will never meet on the Southside of Chicago or in Harlem. For if he is anything at all, he is the symbol of Wright’s new philosophy—the glorification of nothingness.”\textsuperscript{10}
REFERENCES


7. Robert Bone 11-12.

