Chapter I

From Stereotype to Archetype
According to Richard Wright, literature is a form of protest. As a writer he is endowed with the eye of a skilled reporter, the sensibility of a revolutionary poet, and alertness to varied forms of injustice. It is his monumental act of will that sustained his artistic career; a fitting reply to his white employer in which the young Richard confides his ambition to become a writer only to receive the predicted response: “You’ll never become a writer . . . . Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?” The psyche of the child grows in a world that is more brutal and violent. Experiencing the unusual trauma of “black existence,” the nigger grows bigger assuming the Bigger’s proportions to be crucified for the salvation of his black race.

Wright, identifying himself with his heroes, defines “blackness” as the revolution to liberate the “whole of black man” —the body, the mind, and the soul that have been tempered by the eternal servitude. It is an open challenge to the unabated power and superiority of the whites that keeps on nourishing its sustenance from the black man’s voluntary acceptance of their fate. It is an identity fixed by society that every Wright’s hero rejects and looks for enjoying the self-quest. It is an echo of the rebel-victims’ cry for recognition and universal justice in a
society that compels the black to believe that the only way to stay alive is to stay in line.

Afraid of the omniscience and omnipotence of the whites, living in constant fear and tension, the blacks learn to teach their progeny "the Ethics of Living Jim Crow." Edward Bland calls this predicament of the blacks "pre-individualism." But Ralph Ellison says that the state of pre-individualism is an artificial induction meant to impress the Negro child . . . that whites appear as ahuman as Jehovah, and as relentless as a Mississippi flood. . . . To wander from the paths of behavior laid down for the group is to become the agent of communal disaster. 2

The behavioural patterns of the blacks are governed by their innateness to remain subservient and this innateness is an outcome of their oppression by the white world. The plight of the blacks is similar to that of the untouchables in India as realistically accounted for by the leftist novelist Mulk Raj Anand. The blacks accepting their subservience with their bent legs, stooped shoulders, parted lips, and the stares that never went up to have eye to eye contact in the presence of the whites is
characteristic of black existence. The intonation of a nigger-obsequiousness is marked by “No’m,” “Yessum,” “Yessir,” and “Nawsir.”

Wright gives a vivid account of the social, economical, political, emotional, physiological, and psychological environment, and their influence on the emergence of a “nigger” and how the nigger is conditioned and tempered thereafter in his “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born.” The imperialistic haul of history placed the Negro, snatching him away from his African home in the shackles of slavery, on the fertile soil of the South, and when the Negroes were freed they outnumbered the whites.

The segregation was done after the Civil War by the terror of the Ku Klux Klan. The Negro population was kept away from casting their franchise for the fear that it would be a license to control the richest lands of the South that in turn would pave the way for interference in the control of political and economic destiny of a third of the Republic. The demarcation between the whites and the blacks gave rise to two separate worlds: the white world and the black world. Everything was marked FOR WHITES or FOR COLOURED. Many rules and sanctions were imposed to regulate the blacks and keep them under check. American pro-slavery writers tried their best to confirm the Negro’s position as
a slave. John Saffm of Massachusetts must have laboured hard
to compress in so few words all the gross anti-Negro sentiments
of his day, in “The Negroes’ Character”:

Cowardly and cruel, are those Blacks Innate,
Prone to Revenge, Imp of Inveterate hate,
He that exasperates them; soon espies
Mischief and Murder in their eyes.
Libidinous, Deceitful, False and Rude,
The spume issue of Ingratitude. 3

The oppression continued and those who could not adjust
to the Jim Crow life were labelled rebels and severely punished
lest the rest tread the same path:

The white neighbor decided to limit the amount of
education his black neighbor could receive; decided
to keep him off the police force and out of the local
national guards; to segregate him residentially; to
Jim Crow him in public places; to restrict his
participation in the professions and jobs; and to build
up a vast, dense ideology of racial superiority that
would justify any act of violence taken against him to
defend white dominance; and further, to condition
him to hope for little and to receive that little without rebelling. 4

Richard Wright describes the genesis of the American Negro in his *The Outsider*, Part II "Dream," in Ely Houston's speech:

The way Negroes were transported to this country and sold into slavery, then stripped of their tribal culture and held in bondage; and then allowed, so teasingly and over so long a period of time, to be sucked into our way of life is something which resembles the rise of all men from whatsoever it was we all came from. (128)

According to Robert Bone, Wright's major literary theme is directed towards the conception of the bare fact that

the entire society is mobilized to keep the Negro in his place: to restrict his freedom of movement, discourage his ambition, and banish him for ever to the nether regions of subordination and inferiority. This attempt to mark off in advance the boundaries of human life is Wright's essential theme. 5
Joan Urban feels,

Wright's works did more to alter white society's perception of blacks and to raise the social conscience of his nation than the works of any other black author before him. No matter whether he was writing revolutionary poems, essays, travelogues, short stories, novels, or memoirs, he always acted as a spokesman for other native sons and daughters. 6

Before making an attempt to explore the thematic concerns of Richard Wright, let me throw light on the origin and growth of the artistic activities of the blacks that paved the way for the emergence of Negro Literature and in turn African-American literature. "Negro" (an old-fashioned, often offensive) refers to a member of a race of people with dark skin who originally came from Africa. Black is the word most widely used and generally accepted in Britain. In the US the currently accepted term is African American. However, the term Negro is retained in course of my discussion, as a reflector of the intended use of the author as well as the critics. It is noteworthy that

Studies devoted to the Negro in American literature, either as image or creator, scarcely exist before the
twentieth century, and do not flourish until the
1920s, when the Jazz Age's rage for all things Negro
gave impetus to the Negro Renaissance, and the
1930s, when a pervasive social consciousness
gathered the Negro into the wider sweep of economic
interpretations of the Republic.

Obscure are the artistic activities of the early blacks who
were imported as slaves from the West African coast to the
sizeable English settlements of Jamestown. Though the
memories of old culture failed to yield the new one, the remnants
of the past remained only in song, dance, and tales told in
slaves' quarters and in work places. However, Jupiter Hammon
and Phillis Wheatley were the pioneer poets of the black
versification. The latter's verse bears her blackness as a direct
reference:

'T was mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that here's a Saviour, too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our race with scornful eye-
"Their color is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain
May be refined, and join th’ angelic train. 8

Phillis Wheatley condemned slavery in her poem dedicated to the Earl of Dartmouth:

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch’d from Afric’s fancy’d happy seat:
What Pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?
Steel’d was the soul and by no misery mov’d
That from a father seiz’d his babe belov’d
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway? 9

Yearning for freedom is the rallying cry of many poets but the spirit is best seen not in the versification but in the prose, mostly in the slave narratives, as in Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845). Douglass’ Narrative is a psychological account, an intolerable condition of blackness becoming synonymous with slavery; and Douglass ascertaining his manhood while retaining his identity. Douglass described his plight in his autobiography. How the slave-breakers used to tame the slaves is vivid. The scars which the Negro breaker, Covey, put on Frederick’s shoulders never went away:
Under Covey's heavy blows blood flowed freely, and wales were left on my back as large as my little finger. The source from this flogging continued for weeks for they were kept open by the rough and coarse cloth which I wore for shirting. . . during the first six months I was there I was whipped, either with sticks or cow-skins, every week. Aching bones and a sore back were my constant companions.  

The Slave Narratives, though they contained truth as claimed by their authors, are seen very close to fiction and William Wells Brown, the successor of Douglass as the outstanding antislavery agent, published the first novel in America by a Negro Clotel in 1853; the theme of the novel being miscegenation. Harriet Tubman, like Frederick Douglass, devoted her life to the cause of freedom and the advancement of her people.

W. Chesnutt's fiction began at the end of the nineteenth century representing the dominant tradition in America from the 1870s and mostly blackness "in part" as the significant theme. After the death of Frederick Douglass in 1895, the two Negro leaders Booker T Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, faced the problem of being black. It was the period of crisis for the whole of
the black race and the Negro was rated as a second-class citizen. Disenfranchisement, Jim Crow Legislation, and socio-economic destabilization were some of the factors.

Booker T. Washington, born of a slave family, experienced the plight of being born black in America. Starting as a miner in a coal mine, his journey from Malden to Hampton's Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia to receive education and later to head Tuskegee Institute, a famous college for the African Americans, shows his strong determination and sheer dint of hard work and struggle. He had a vision that industrial education could serve as the only means to economic independence favouring racial cooperation rather than political action. His works like *The Story of My Life and Work*, *Up From Slavery* and *My Larger Education* are a record of the success of a self-made man who combined hard work with Christian virtue. He founded the National Negro Business League.

He wrote in *Up From Slavery* about his struggle for education. He had his first experience in finding out what the colour of his skin meant when he was refused food and accommodation by the inn-keeper at a ramshackle inn. However, his soul was so bent upon reaching Hampton that he did not
have time to cherish any bitterness toward the hotel-keeper. He made his famous speech in 1895:

One third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. . . .To those of my race who . . . underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbour, I would say 'cast down your bucket where you are. 'Cast it down making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded. Cast it down in agriculture, machines, in commerce, in domestic service, and in profession . . . No race can prosper until it learns that there is much dignity in tilling the field as in writing a poem . . . To those of the white race . . . I would repeat what I say to may own race. . . .  

Du Bois, the most impressive black intellectual of his times, thinking that old standards were not adequate, contemplated the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), with the objective of achieving for Negroes full participation in the American democracy. It also helped the emergence of the Negro Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance that accepted the cultural pluralism so as to
facilitate an American Negro to contain the sustenance of the African roots and also to be the part of American civilization. One can notice that inner struggle between accommodation and rebellion is a central theme in Afro-American history. It is obvious that one, who embraces militancy, casts off the robes of a booker T Washington and assumes the mantle of Frederick Douglass or a W.E.B. Du Bois.

It is evident that some of the black writers in America drew inspiration from their being black that can be termed as their artistic strength as in the case of Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin. But some writers thought that blackness prevented them from accomplishing the achievement of the artistic distinction. Many of the writers of the Renaissance, Toomer, Mckay, Cullen, Hughes, Johnson and Arna Bontemps wrote both fiction and poetry.

Thomas Dixon and others held certain misguided assumptions that blacks were without culture, close to the ape on the evolutionary scale and therefore incapable of any education other than vocational, hyper-sexed, and without any responsibility. However, the Negro Renaissance was paralleled by Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association. Blackness in 1930s often meant dislocation, sickness and
unemployment and general misery and the writers found it very
difficult to find a publisher. And in the middle of this great
depression Richard Wright made his emergence as a writer. Even
the universities ignored writings of the American Negroes until
Negro literature became black literature.

Black Power Movement gave rise to the emergence of black
aesthetic and revision of the black's place in American society.
Wright wanted the American black and the white to face the
realities of black life in a society that trained to ignore them. The
African American women writers like Toni Morrison and Alice
Walker are the descendants of the legacy of the BAM. To these
writers the search for the self lies in the transformation of black
experiences into trope. The theme of difference between women
and women, men and women, blacks and blacks is a very
important one in Black Literature. Toni Morrison writes about
the black novel as follows:

I don't regard Black Literature as simply books
written by Black people, or simply as literature
written about Black people, or simply as literature
that uses a certain mode of language in which you
just sort of drop g's. There is something very special
and very identifiable about it and it is my struggle to find that elusive but identifiable style in the books.12

The crucial period of growth and development of the modern black novel is the late forties and the early fifties and the pioneer efforts were of Invisible Man (1952) by Ralph Ellison, and Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953) by James Baldwin, and The Outsider (1953) by Richard Wright. Blackness remained an element of creativity but not as a mark of shame, nor a badge of honour. Richard Wright wrote about his visit to the Gold Coast in 1953 in Black Power (1954). Wright's disappointment with what he found in Africa is something intuitive; even a breakdown irrecoverable for him. After his trip to West Africa, Wright's involvement in intrigues and battles reflects in his spirited contributions to Africaine conference in Paris in 1956.

Kay Boyle views “black Power” and its significant impact as good sign:

Sweet hearts, the script has changed. . .

And with it the stage directions which advise

Lowered voices, genteel asides,

And the white hand slowly turning the dark page.13
The works of Richard Wright signified a turning point, a transition from the peaceful “Negro Renaissance” to a period of rebellion and revolution. Melvin Tolson heralded the birth of this new epoch in his poem “Dark Symphonie”:

The New Negro

Breaks the icons of his detractors,
Wipes out the conspiracy of silence,
Speaks to his America:
“My history-moulding ancestors
Planted the first crops of wheat on these shores,
Built ships to conquer the seven seas,
Erected the Cotton Empire,
Flung railroads across a hemisphere,
Disemboweled the earth’s iron and coal,
Tunneled the mountains and bridged rivers,
Harvested the grain and hewed forests . . .
Fought a hundred battles for the Republic.”

The New Negro:

His giant hands fling murals upon high chambers,
His drama teaches a world to laugh and weep,
His voice thunders the Brotherhood of Labor,
His science creates seven wonders,
His Republic of Letters challenges the Negro-baiters.15

Richard Wright's unhappy childhood, unsteady education, and the numerous upheavals that he encountered carried with them the vitality into his writings. Born on September 04, 1908 in Roxie, Mississippi, to an illiterate sharecropper Nathan Wright and a school teacher Ella Wilson Wright, Wright had no beautiful childhood to talk about. The family moving to Natchez in 1911 and in 1913 to Memphis followed by Nathan's deserting the family for another woman and Ella's working as cook to support the family, Richard entering school at Howe institute in 1915 and leaving it in 1918 to earn money for the sustenance of the family— all had their effect on the child- psyche of Wright. Wright used to gather excess coal next to the rail road tracks to heat the home. They had to return to Jackson when his mother suffered a paralyzing stroke. At the age of 13, Richard entered the fifth grade in Jackson and continued to deliver newspapers besides working as a travelling insurance salesman. By running errands for the whites, he managed to earn to buy textbooks, food, and clothes. His reading of pulp novels, magazines and anything that he got gave impetus to his first short story, "The Woods of Hell's Half Acre," that was published in the Jackson Southern Register.
Wright's readings of H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Frank Harris, and others influenced the writer in him. During his school days, Wright happened to read an article that denounced H.L. Mencken's books and wanted to know what kind of books they were that could evoke such rage. But the library was only for whites. He furtively wrote a note—"Dear Madam: Will you please let this nigger boy . . . have some books by H.L.Mencken?" and began to borrow books for a fictitious white gentleman. He also read Dostoyevsky and Joseph Conrad, read Capital and The State and Revolution. R.Orlova observes,

His reading opened up new worlds for him and aroused new thoughts, desires, dreams, the urge to search out and understand the meaning of life—his own and that of others in a similar position to his own who lived in America and elsewhere. This urge led him out of his dumbness. And his own flashes of insight became discoveries in the world of language.

Later Wright found a temporary placement in the postal service, Chicago, and continued to write regularly and attend meetings of black literary groups. Until then he was working as a
dishwasher and delivery boy. Consequent to the stock market crash, he lost his postal job but never gave up the zeal for writing. *Cesspool* that he began in 1930 got published in 1970's as "Lawd Today!" reflecting his postoffice experiences. He became the member of the Communist Party and continued to write to *Left Front, Anvil* and *New Masses*. His speech "The Isolation of the Negro Writer" in the American Writers' Congress in New York was very significant. After his return, he was hired by the Federal Writers' Project to research the history of Illionois and of the Negro in Chicago. His short story "Big Boy Leaves Home" published in *The New Caravan Anthology* attracted critical attention.

James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and Chester Himes were the most notable presences of Wright. He was also influenced by Fredric Wertham's *Dark Legend* and began to take a keen interest in psychoanalysis. Wright held strong opposition to Roosevelt's racial policies in a 27 June speech to the NAACP not withholding the pressure from the Communist party to lessen the critique. However, he signed a petition supporting America's entry into the war as a sequel to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He tried for securing a special commission in the
psychological warfare or propaganda services of the army but in vain.

In 1943, the FBI began interviewing Wright's associates and neighbours to find out whether *12 Million Black Voices* was an incitement to rebellion. Ironically, the inquiry concluded in 1943 but the FBI continued to haunt Wright until his death. In response to the persistent racism he experienced or encountered in America, he wanted to move to France as a permanent expatriate. In France, he travelled extensively and took active part in anti-colonial movements. On November 28, 1960 Wright died of a heart attack and was cremated on the 3 of December along with a copy of *Black Boy*.

Richard Wright asked Margaret Walker to send him newspaper clippings from the Robert Nixon case in Chicago while working on *Native Son*. By February, 1939 he completed the second draft of *Native Son* and in June finished the final and the novel was published in March, 1940. The book was banned in Birmingham, Alabama libraries but Wright became internationally famous. The stage adaptation of *Native Son* was a disappointment with Paul Green but with Orson Welles it was quite successful. In 1947, a Hollywood producer offered to film *Native Son* but with a proposal to change Bigger Thomas to a
white man and Wright was bold enough to come out with a blunt refusal. He himself played “Bigger” in a motion picture version of *Native Son* made in Argentina in 1951. He considered Bigger Thomas a meaningful and prophetic symbol, the portrayal that he liked most.

Sidney Finkelstein, in *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature*, comments on the Negroes’ portrayal as subhuman creatures in literature as follows:

As long as a mass of white people conceive whatever minimal security they think they have as resting on the secondary status of the Negro. . . this ‘monster’ image will emerge as a product of their own alienation. People who have essentially the same hopes, feelings and potentialities as they, who should be seen as human kin, are seen as fearsome and alien.

The alienation felt by an exploiter for the exploited can be given ideological support, like theories of the alleged inferiority of Negroes or ‘strangeness’ of Jews. But alienation itself is psychological and self-divisive, a projection by the
hater upon others of the image of the inhuman practices to which he himself feels driven. 17

Richard Wright’s works are in the tradition of American novels which deal with the search for identity and rebirth. The protagonist is confronted with the questions like who he is, whether he is independent and self-assertive or he is dependent and self-effacing. This conflict leads him to remain forever in search of himself.

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas is in quest of his identity. His incapability to adjust himself to the Jim Crow environment compels him to set out in search of his identity. He finds his identity and rebirth after committing two murders. Resorting to violence and crime gives him his essential freedom and real existence. Violence assuages his idealized-self. His longing for the public identification as the murderer reveals his growth from neurosis to joyful self-actualization. It is not the innate criminality of the hero but individual delinquency produced by the defective environment. In the words of Camus when Bigger rebels he unleashes a “raging torrent.”

In *The Long Dream*, Fishbelly is also in search of himself moving from rebellion to acceptance while growing from
childhood into adulthood. His self-assertiveness is replaced by self-effacing nature, being educated by his father to toe the line of the whites. What black fathers have done throughout the generations, according to Wright, is teach their offspring to kowtow to whites until they have no pride left, in themselves or their heritage. 155

Fish feels during his resolution to have his flight lamenting his state, "Papa . . . you left something that's marked me! It's like it's in my blood! . . . My Papa, my papa's papa, and my papa's papa's papa, look what you done to me (The Long Dream, 345-46).

Fish struggles a lot to go through the phase of transformation experiencing the excruciating pain of the ritual of initiation. He resorts to sexual experiences to feel the liberation of his self. When Cantley, the Chief of Police, encounters him but fails to extract the truth, he feels frustrated and says that despite their making them scared of the whites and then asking them to tell the truth, the new breed of niggers cannot speak the truth. However, this resistance can be seen as the means of shielding the self. During his detainment, Fish realizes that he does not know how to act in a reassuring manner towards the white enemy. His incapacity to cope with the white world is the
result of his ingenuous belief that he could retain his self-hood while pretending not to. Ironically, his existence in the former world doesn’t fulfill the quest for identity but takes to romancing and in turn registers failure and is rejected by society.

The thematic concern of *The Outsider* is also search for freedom that lies in his will to power. His existence in seeking freedom poses a challenge to the Communists’ will to overpower him. The resultant clash finds in him a “metaphysical rebel.” Edward Margolies in *The Art of Richard Wright* observes: “Moreover, since Cross equates freedom with power, freedom actually means the successful subjugation of the will of others; thus the dream of universal freedom is a logical impossibility.” 19

*Lawd Today!* accounts for the displacement of African life in a country that doesn’t want it and seeking a meaning to its nothingness. Jake and his friends attempt to give a meaning to their empty lives by sporting flashy clothes, indulging in drinking and merry making and spending their earnings on whores. Sex and drink compensate for and fill their empty and meaningless lives. The novel presents the anguish and ultimate violence associated with black life. We see this latent violence getting translated into action in *Native Son*. There is also a demarcation in the life of the blacks—some refusing to identify themselves
with the poor blacks and wishing to identify themselves with the successful ones. George E. Kent points out,

Laud Today! enlarges our perspective on *Native Son*, for it creates the universe of Bigger Thomas in terms more dense than the carefully chosen symbolic reference points of Native Son. The continuity of Wright's concerns stand [sic] out with great clarity and depth. Running through all Wright's works and thoroughly pervading his personality is his identification with and rejection of the West, and his identification with and rejection of the conditions of black life. *Laud Today!* is primarily concerned with the latter. 20

Erskine Fowler in *Savage Holiday* is the same person who can be identified with Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, Cross Damon in *The Outsider*, Jake Jackson in *Laud Today!* and Richard Wright in Black Boy. The psychosexual aspects of Wright's fiction and his negative treatment of women are striking in the novel. The theme of oppression is the all pervading thought of Wright's works. In *Native Son*, as identified by Hugh Gloster, that the idea "that a prejudiced and capitalistic social order, rather than any intrinsic human deficiency, is the cause
of the frustration and rebellion of underprivileged Negro youth of America. Similarly, oppression—social, racial, physical, psychological—is seen in other works.

The central theme of "dread" showing the influence of the existential philosophy on Wright is all pervasive in his works. Dread is the prelude to the despair and flight and ultimate tragedy or escape from the real self of the protagonists of Wright. During his flight to Paris, Fish realizes the dread that hunted him down in his past world:

He had fled a world that he had known and that had emotionally crucified him . . . . Could he ever make the white faces around him understand how they had charged his world with images of beckoning desire and dread? Naw, naw . . . . No one could believe the kind of life he had lived and was living. (The Long Dream, 383)

The titles of chapters in each of Wright's novels deserve the reader's attention. Fish's dread is responsible for his "daydreams and night dreams" and it persists for many "days and nights" and finally ends up in a "waking dream." These titles are united by their imagery in The Long Dream.
Dread has its powerful sway on Bigger until he has emerged a successful rebel seeking existential self. He lives the life of a hardcore nigger haunted by dread. His subdued behaviour at the Daltons and his discomfort level in the company of Mary and her Communist lover Jan, show that he is victimized by “Fear” that drives him to embark upon a “Flight,” to be destined by his “Fate.” The list of stories in the collection *Eight Men* reads like a contemporary poem.

*The Man Who Was Almost a Man*

*The Man Who Lived Underground*

*Big Black Good Man*

*The Man Who Saw The Flood*

*Man of All Work*

*Man, God Ain’t Like That*

*The Man Who Killed a Shadow*

*The Man Who Went to Chicago*

Cross Damon in *The Outsider* dreads himself and his family and takes a dreadful guise of an “outsider.” His killing Joe is prompted by his dread. Dread continues to haunt him. He does not disclose his guile for the fear of being prosecuted. Cross’s “dread” drives him to “dream,” in which he forgoes his identity, and thereafter to experience the “descent” of acting the
role of a little god in the process of eliminating the other little
gods, and encounters a “despair” that, on getting compounded,
leaves him to have his own “decision” in punishing himself as
there is only psychological evidence to his dreadful crimes.

As Wright says that literature is a form of protest, his
protest is seen in *The Long Dream*, “against the injustice that
destroys his spirit, crushes his dignity.” Boris Max’s protest
against the oppressive conditions that prevent blacks from
achieving self-realization is supportive of his holding society
responsible for the criminality of Bigger in *Native Son*. *The
Outsider* registers a protest against the little gods who take
control of society by killing others for acquiring naked power.
There are hints of dissatisfaction with the protest tradition in
Ralph Ellison’s “Richard Wright’s Blues”:

> Like Baldwin, Ellison felt that the experience of the
Negro American “had been distorted through the
overemphasis of the sociological approach”; that any
attempt to define the Negro “predicament in
exclusively sociological terms” would, perforce, short-
circuit the exploration of “the full range of American
Negro humanity” and obliterate those qualities in the
race “which are of value beyond any question of
segregation, economics of previous condition of servitude.\textsuperscript{23}

At the end the protagonists are left with isolation, victimization, psychological castration but with the continuing quest for existential self. The alienation that they experience is autobiographical of Wright's—as a child and as a man. The only difference is that the author overcame the social alienation but his characters did not. The multifaceted dimensions of these oppressive factors casting their potent sway on the potentiality of the central characters and whether they submerge with them or surface out and if so to what extent, are analysed in the following chapters.
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10. Langston Hughes 29.

11. Langston Hughes 50.


16. R. Orlova 397.


22. Margolies 151.