



ABSURDITY OF VIOLENCE IN CHESTER HIMES' BLIND MAN WITH A PISTOL

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Abstract

Often mystery novels merge the reader's confrontation with violence. Himes was extremely well in maneuvering violence in his novels. But he handled distinctly by exhibiting the absurdity of violence. Therefore, he chooses Harlem as the setting for his entire mystery series. The present paper aims to project the fact that how Himes captured the experience of black's life in most urban American cities. An analytical research is made to elaborate the real fact. However, scholars suggested that, it went beyond the predictable detective story genre and reflects Himes' concern with the breakdown of social order in America more specifically in Harlem. The extreme and unconventional behaviour of Harlem people symbolize the aspects of every major social psychological theory of violence and proven that violence can also be used as a solution to stop the problem as if in the case of African-American people.

Key Words: Absurdity of Violence, Experience of Black's Life, Unconventional Behaviour of Harlem People.

The atmosphere of violence and the sense of absurdity that dominate Himes' novels are present in *Blind Man with a Pistol*. The title *Blind Man with a Pistol* illogically represents metaphor 'blindly' for the senseless, unorganized violence sweeping around the frustrated black community. While tracing down the background of the novel Phil Lomax, an American writer casually recounted the true story of a 'subway shooting' in Harlem that a blind man with a gun shooting at a man, who had slapped him on the subway train and killed an another innocent man who was reading his newspaper.

Therefore, Himes had a thought that all unorganized violence is like a blind man with a pistol. Later he developed his work *Blind Man with a Pistol* out of the story told by Lomax. Unlike most crime fiction, *Blind Man with a Pistol* has no conclusion. Various mysteries pursued in irregular chapters of the novel. It is filled with characters include a 100 years old black man, his twelve wives, their dozens of children a fake African witch doctor, and an aging tough guy who sets off a string of senseless murders, homosexual prostitutes, knife fights, subway shootings, obscene graffiti, drug abuse, polygamy, and bombed-out tenements. Therefore, *Blind Man with a pistol* is perhaps more than any other American novel of the 1960s, has a bright exposure of the pathological behaviors of the newly designated, discovered, and discursively produced racial and class formation in United States.

The opening scene of *Blind Man with a Pistol* takes readers to the place, which is considered as black underclass around 1960's. The novel engages in the risky strategy of hyperbolizing the existing images of subjugated people's abjectness in cartoonish, ideological constructs. It shows of Harlem's social failures particularly of the black family whose foundations were rotting among the white's society. Himes stated that outsiders who intrude into the black home will misinterpret the social habits of black people. The scene becomes difficult to inclination when the Reverend Sam enters with 11 nuns who work as prostitutes. They are followed by 50 naked children who swill like pigs at drain on the floor. One officer declares as, 'They ain't nothing but niggers'(12). The scene is reminiscent of the middle of the Congo, a nightmare of prehistoric communal living unfolding in the center of America's urban jungle. Yet this house of sexually squalid ripeness is rotting rapidly towards death, as the cops discover in the house's dirt cellar, the remains of three female bodies. This startling discovery promises clue to us into the real nature of the violence in the black underclass family. However, the shock leads nowhere. The subject of these murders is never mention again by the text.

Like the hidden abode in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, this cellar apartment materializes it as a place for violent sign throughout the novel. The opening chapter not only emphasizes Himes' recurring theme but also ensures that anything can happen in Harlem. It proven the difficulty of life in Harlem as Ellison had suggested earlier as, *Harlem is nowhere*, a repository for social waste. "To live in Harlem is to dwell in the very bowels of the city" (295).

The representation of the underclass in both Himes's novel and in urban studies of black life, further concentrates abjection within a brutalizing architecture that distort its residents. The anger of the white man towards the waiter at the lunch counter in Theresa building is an incongruous one. The funny conversation among the white sissies and waiter boost the rage of white man. However, the strange situation came to be calm one by their smartness in speech. Himes bring out the emotion as, "The white man's face flamed again. He lifted his cup of coffee. His hand shook so it slopped over on the counter. Don't be nervous, the waiter said. You got made it. Put down your money and take your choice" (17-18).



As a usual work, Digger and Ed patrol the Harlem Valley, the poor stretch between 130th and 140th Streets from Seventh Avenue to Lenox. There they could find a partially nude white male who has been slashed by a transvestite prostitute in an interracial homosexual homicide. They trace his last movements along to an underground apartment furnished like a boudoir.

The accustomed visit of Coffin and Digger to Harlem city leads them to the mystification out of the death of a pant less white man. They disappointed highly when the dying man lost his life without giving any hint of the murderers. Therefore, the detectives blabbered as,

Jesus,' Grave Digger echoed as he slowly straightened his bent figure.

Jesus Bastard! What a thing to say.

Coffin Ed's face was like a thundercloud. Jesus, Digger, Goddammit! he flared. What you want him to say, Jesus hallelujah? The mother- raper got his throat cut for a black whore –How you know it was a black whore who did it? (33).

Leaving the underground crime scene, the detectives visit another Harlem tenement covered with graffiti that “gave the illusion of primitive painting of pygmies affected with elephantiasis of the genitals” (85). Digger remarks, “How anyone could stay honest who lived here? ... This place was built for vice, for whores to hustle in and thieves to hide out in. And somebody got a building permit, because it's been built after the ghetto got here” (84).

Himes' representations of Harlem's omnipresent violence and pathology are not restricted to the socially and geographically lower land around the Valley. Blind Man's second murder plot transpires in a house on the Hill, where the sale of a sperm elixir by a pretense doctor turns deadly when festering sexual jealousies among a whole slew of new characters are revealed. The violence in this black bourgeois neighborhood is more graphic than it is down in the underclass slums.

Instead of presenting its bloody aftermath as in the first murder plot, Himes dramatizes the mayhem directly through the words,

Viola stabbed him in the back.... he wheeled on her in red-eyed rage ... stabbed her in the heart, and in the same motion turned and stabbed Van Raff in the head.... Doctor Mubuta ran up behind him stabbed him in the back.... The short, muscular man handled his knife with authority and stabbed Doctor Mubuta to death (44-45).

The short chapter's climatic knife fight involves the wheeling acrobatics of eight characters, none of whom have been presented before to the reader. Nevertheless, this weird Scene becomes more confusing when it is considered in the larger context of the novel. Therefore, Edward Margolies in her work *Native Sons* stated that,

In the crime novels of the black writer Chester Himes, [Raymond] Chandler's blend of realism and exaggeration is exuberantly developed. His series novels of paint life in Harlem, including all levels of society from the pimps to the rich, in a direct, brusque style which is so very American that it is amazing Himes' reputation had to be particularly established in France (where he is considered the Balzac of Harlem) (87-88).

However, the quarrel among Doctor Mubuta, Mister Sam, Viola, and Van ruff is not yet cleared out. The declaration of Himes regarding the subjugation of blacks is ironical as well as mockery. Thus, the words of Doctor Mubuta expressed it as,

We're gonna out live the white folks. While they has been concentrating on ways of death, I has been concentrating on how to extend life. While they'll be dying, we'll be living forever, and Mister Sam here, the oldest of all of us, will be alive to see the day when the black man is the majority on the earth, and the white man his slave (39).

A Gladstone bag made the conflict even stronger. The rejuvenation medicine prepared by Doctor Mubuta for Sam's youth full life paves way for the chaos. Not only the discrimination but also the sexual urge of men creates the anxiety.

The violence used by Himes seems to be an attempt to express the rage. That exists in Harlem and other black communities because of the strange hold that white authority has one of the most disturbing scenes occurs at the hideout where the criminal gangs are conducting some scams. The theme of violence in Himes novels projected the absurd nature of the American society. In most of the black writings, the fatalities might be black people. But the novel *Blind Man with a Pistol* deviated from the usual track. Because the victims of this novel are white people like Johnson X, a chauffeur, the white man who was mocked by the waiter, Mistah Charley, Pant less white man, and so on.



The scenes of violence in Himes's novels are drawn from what Himes saw and knew of black life in America. It envisioned the fact that he was concerned with the social ways and economic inequality that affected the lives of blacks in the United States. However, the contrasted presentation of blacks bullying the white created a comic sense, the philosophical considerations taught something to each oppressed being not only of Harlem but of all over the world.

Therefore, it is apt to state that, Himes attempted to articulate a thesis of the ways in which blacks should respond to that inequality. Though Himes was living in exile, he had a better grip on what lay in the future for African American than many writers and intellectuals would realize. Hence, *Blind Man with a Pistol* acquaintances raging crimes that are never solved, and the motive for murder are never established. It provides absurd strategies for rationalizing American racism and it invalidates justice, humanity and the possibility of love between men and women by means of violent measures. Chester Himes has thus brought out the absurdly nature of violence in the novel chosen for study.

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