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RON MILNER'S MORALISTIC WEAPON FACING THE OPPRESSION OF THE WHITES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze Ron Milner's concept in facing the oppression of the whites against the black people through moralistic messages. Milner attempts to write about characters without condescension. He handles the ordinary blacks believing that there are truths which are extremely self-evident; that goodness always wins whereas evil is bound to fail and diminish. His life in the ghetto made him communicate honestly and fully with a deeper examination and understanding of what he saw and heard. He did his best in translating his intellectual powers into communicatively readable works of art. This paper shows Milner's message to his black people of facing the white's oppression morally, not by violence. Milner was socially oriented; he has great moral concern for his audiences. He wished to strip away illusion and deceit in order to expose the real. Consequently, his dramas come as a mirror to social experience and a catalyst of social and moral ameliorative change. Through shedding light on some of Milner's plays, this paper tries to point out how Milner glorifies qualities which he considers intrinsic virtues of the black man; qualities such as dignity, nobility and courage. Consequently, he concerns himself not with a morality corrupt society, but rather with black Americans, as paragons of excellence for other blacks, who construct their lives out of decisions made. His dramas thus intended for black audiences in community theatres. He presented domestic dramas about ordinary people. Milner is a realistic dramatist who states not only what is, but what can and should be. Milner attempts to show his black people not only in their dreadful stance, but also in a reality that could be ameliorated through adhering to moral and social values. As a major black dramatist, Milner has concentrated on plays designed to educate the masses of blacks to understandings which must characterize their actions. He holds morals and morality very high. Throughout his dramatic works, he sides with all that is good and opposes evil and wickedness.

As a zealous enthusiastic proponent of Black Arts Movement, Ron Milner believes that black theatre functions to liberate black people not only from white supremacy but also, and more importantly, from their negative self-image. He firmly believes that it is only blacks who shall speak and act for blacks. He directs a serious message to his black brethren to assert themselves in word and deed. That is why his theatre is distinct with its search for, and exploration of, black identity and the assertion of black consciousness and moral value system. He wants to instill not just black consciousness into the minds of his black audiences but also planting in that

consciousness a conscientious moral sense which urges them to better their conduct and their moral stance.

The literary narratives related to subjectivity encompass the following themes and concepts: identity, language, ethnicity, culture, memory, re-memory, hybridity, sense of dispossession, colonialism, imperialism, post colonialism, psychic trauma, hyphenated-identities, marginalization, and finally subjectivity at geographical, cultural, emotional and psychological levels

Introduction

Ron Scott Milner (better known as Ron Milner), a leading figure in contemporary American theatre, is highly acknowledged as one of best black dramatists of the late 1960s and 1970s. Milner advocates the assertion of a black moral value system. The purpose of his writing is to inculcate a sense of morality among blacks. He started his career as a novelist but soon he shifted significantly to drama because it provided to him a better and a more forceful context for expressing his didacticism and moralizing. He strongly believes in that speech that leads not to action still more that hinders it, is a nuisance on the earth.

Milner's pivotal goal is to create a black theatre with black heroes and moral values. He is concerned with performing a service to the black community. He wants to purge his drama, his mind and his audience's mind, as well, of evil ideas dictated by an oppressive society. However, together with the feeling that as a black dramatist, he can not but be committed to the edification of his race, Milner felt he had to look toward universality. So obsessed was he with the moral mission he wishes to perform that he would not even allow the critic's rules to restrain or restrict him from pursuing and fulfilling that mission: namely, to educate and edify his people.

As a believer in the black Arts Movement and the black Aesthetic Milner understands that their nature is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. And so, Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the black power concept. As such it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of black America. As a true black artist, Milner takes this to mean that , his primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of black people.

Morality and ethics are essential to Milner; he sees them as the way out of the black's predicament. He does believe that there is no separation between ethics and aesthetics. Thus, Milner makes it very clear that he is not really concerned with the critical reception of his plays or with their performance on Broadway; Broadway doesn't want blackness, wasn't designed or intended for it; definitely doesn't want any strange new forms inspired by that very blackness. What Milner simply wants is to morally edify his black people, to make them think and to enlighten them as to the best way out of their predicament; i.e. to adhere to morality and ethics.

Milner is a dramatist who is busy thinking of his people's problems of facing the white demon as such, he has a deep sense of responsibility towards his audiences. His sense of responsibility and commitment is so powerful and profound that the moral tone rings audibly through-out his work. He develops the concept of "God-Conscious" art to replace European "self-centered" art which he believes to be affected by materialism and based on external feeling. Milner's art, being God-conscious, is, on the contrary, presumably guided by the creatively, impulsively instinctive light that emanates from within. Milner with sensitivity and restraint explores the meanings of black manhood and womanhood. He attempts to redefine, clarify, and restore to blacks an awareness and appreciation of their being. His message is that theatre should be used to raise the level of the nation's consciousness through the promotion of black artistic, political and cultural expression. Even a cursory reading of any of his plays is bound to leave with a confirmed belief that such a playwright is a devout believer in the power of art as a means to an end; namely, that art should be functional, especially in achieving social, political, economic, and moral goals

Milner's theatre and his message of morality to his people

Ron Milner is an American dramatist. He has written fiction and essays but is primarily distinguished as a committed dramatist in the Black Arts theatre Movement in America. He is, "a pioneering force in the contemporary Afro-American theatre."¹ Although he can write in any form, as critic Geneva Smitherman asserts, by his own acknowledgment, Milner is a "natural playwright"²

Ron Milner believes that the oppression of the white against the black people is unbearable so he describes white people as white demon. According to him this oppression can be faced through good manners. Since Milner lived and saw the suffering of the blacks (his people), he sees that the best and strongest weapon to destroy this demon is by nothing but good morals. That's why, the researcher devotes this part to talk about Milner's plays which are morality plays.

Milner believes that facing such demon can be by giving moral lessons to the blacks. Milner places the moral lesson high above any aesthetic purpose. In fact, he disapproves of creating art solely for aesthetic purposes. He believes in the subservience of aesthetic criteria to social and moral ones; he attacks pure hedonism and praises moral intent. Milner asserts the need to add humanity and morality to aestheticism. For he is a talented writer who judges creative art in general and black theatre in particular to be a major vehicle of education. He believes vehemently in the truth of the oft-quoted dictum that. For Milner, art is not an end in itself, but a means of addressing humanity. The artist's function is to interpret life; I see him as a hunter in the jungle with civilization being the jungle; his prey is truth.

The plays of Milner are meant to support Blacks in facing the white demon. As an advocate of the black aesthetics, Milner inveighs against the Western view of art as something separate from everyday life. That is why Milner's plays are meant as means of effecting change, whether on the level of society or, which is equally important, on that of the black individual. Through his dramas, Milner aspired to the achievement of the more idealistic

task of affecting the masses of black people with a new sense of being and spiritualism. He wants to develop within the black person the sense of being responsible; for such a responsibility, in turn, is bound to unify the black community and change it ameliorative.

If some black playwrights believe in violence and force in facing the white demon. Milner doesn't believe in violence. That's to say, dramatists like, Le Roi Jones believe that diamond cuts diamond, thus his theater is the theater of blood. He teaches his people how to carry the weapon against the white people. But, with Ron Milner it is the opposite. Milner, a leading figure in contemporary American theatre, is highly acknowledged as one of the excellent-caliber black dramatists of the late 1960s and 1970s. He is a playwright, editor, and director.

Milner's only non-theatrical piece is his unpublished novel, *Life of the Brothers Brown*, which was read approvingly by Alan Seeger, the "Faulkner of the North"³ As early as 1966, *Negro Digest* periodical referred to Milner as "novelist-playwright"⁴ However, he remains first and foremost in the arena of the theatre either as moralistic playwright or as a committed director. Woodie King, Jr.— a distinguished black theatre actor, director, producer and critic—considers Milner as one of "our best playwrights"⁵ Clayton Riley, a prominent black critic, regards Milner as "completing the triumvirate of playwrights having the greatest impact to date on the black theatre," the other two being Imamu Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins. Riley concludes that Milner's "gifts and his perceptions are exceptionally large (and) vast."⁶

Milner got his education mostly from life. He attended Northeastern High School and. Later High land Park Junior College and the Detroit Institute of Technology. He was mainly educated in the public schools and Columbia University, New York (he attended Harvey Swados's writing workshop at Columbia University, 1965) He studied playwriting at the Henry St. Settlement with Karmyn Lott. Milner comically comments that he attended "nearly every college in the Detroit area Without graduating anywhere." In a 1975 interview

with *Detroit Free Press* writer, Betty De Ramus, Milner joked "I've taught at Colleges more than I've attended."⁷ In fact, he taught culture at various colleges. For instance, he taught at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in which he was also a writer-in-residence. (1966-67). He also taught and conducted a cultural workshop at Michigan State University, East Lansing (1971-72), before returning to Detroit to try to develop a viable community theatre (through the Spirit of Shango Theatre, and the Langston Hughes Theatre. Milner also taught at Wayne State University in Detroit. His work as a teacher enhanced his dramatic career as a moralistic playwright whose committed dramas teach the masses to side with good, and shun evil. This is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht who proclaims that "the main thing is to teach the spectator to reach a verdict"⁸.

Milner received the prestigious John Hay Whitney (1962-63) and Rockefeller (1965-66) Arts Awards which put him in the distinguished company of other Whitney Award recipients like Imamu Amiri Baraka and Paul Robeson. Milner is also listed in *who's who in America*.

Since his early childhood, Milner has been obsessed with the dilemma of his black community. When he was still a high school student, he decided to become a writer so that he could tell the story of his people and direct a moralistic message to them. Writing seemed to him then the salvation and redemption. Whenever he saw the deteriorating circumstances of his black brethren, he felt guilty; he had to do his share in the consciousness raising process. As a result, he made his commitment to writing in an objectively analytical way. Even at such an early age, Milner realized that the people on Hastings Street had a story to tell:

The more I read in high school, the more I realized that some tremendous, phenomenal things were happening around me. What happened in a Faulkner novel, happened four times a day on Hastings Street. I thought why should these crazy people Faulkner writes about seem more important than my mother or my father or the dude down the Street. Only because

they had someone to write about them. So I became a writer."⁹

During the Fifties and sixties, the oppressive shadows of slavery were still hovering over black / white relations in the United States. These shadows were mainly represented in the cruel discrimination in employment and segregation in housing and education. During that turbulent and precarious period, the Black Arts Movement basically a moralistic movement which centered on the black artist's attempts at defining the world in his own terms. came into being. This concept stems from Ron Karenga's outcry that "all art must reflect and support the black revolution, and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid."¹⁰ Karenga's outcry put the first seeds of the cultural revolution and paved the way for a clear-cut distinct black arts movement; such a movement proved of vital necessity for blacks, both individually and collectively. Beunyce Rayford Cunningham argues, "Ron Milner's is essentially a theatre of intense, often lyrical, retrospection devoted primarily to illuminating those past events, personalities, and values which have shaped his struggling people."¹¹

Milner seems to echo what Alain Locke stated earlier in this century that "the Negro today wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings, and scores a craven and precarious survival at the price of seeming to be what he is not."¹² He aims at reorienting the black man in his thinking so as to feel proud of his blackness and to develop a positive moral value system. According to Xavier Nicholas, art should have a "mission" This mission is to raise the level of political consciousness of the broad masses of the people to struggle against their oppression. Nicholas concludes: "our artists, therefore, must project a vision of what the broad masses of the people must struggle for."¹³ Milner extends this to include most importantly the struggle against self-oppression, which emanates from siding with evil.

Milner realized very early in his career that as a black dramatist, he would never be accepted in the mainstream of American theatre for, as he puts it: "American theatre was (and still is) the nut that

few blacks are able to crack."¹⁴ This is due to the directness, urgency and immediacy of the image projected. As a moralistic dramatist, he is more motivationally urged to educate than to fulfill critical norms. That is why he deeply senses the bad need for a committed theatre that reflects the black milieu with its full aspects of good and evil. In this he seems to echo Langston Hughes and Jim Williams. In his article, "The Need for an Afro-American Theatre," Hughes poses the question "Why a negro theatre? In his attempt to answer this question, Hughes comments:

(the blacks) have a number of talented playwrights including Louis Peterson, William Branch, Alice Childress, Charles Sebree, Le Roi Jones, Douglas Turner Ward and Ronald Milner. But we have no theatres of our own in which we may see the plays of the older playwrights in revival, and no stages where the new dramatists may try out their scripts, polish them and learn from the performances. Broad-way pays these Negro play-wrights very little attention.¹⁵

Jim Williams reiterates the need for a black theatre in his illuminating self-explanatory essay "The Need for a Harlem Theatre." He attempts to convince blacks of the bad need to have theatre in Harlem:

Let's bring theatre to the Negro. When we find the key to open Harlem to a sustained, stable, artistic theatre we will have solved our craft problem of theatrical form and meaningful content, and inevitably some of us will have achieved universality as playwrights and greatness as actors.¹⁶

The need for a black theatre became more and more evidently pronounced as black intellectuals realized how such an endeavor could be used to help the black community. As Jim Williams noted: "only such an indigenous theatre can give deeper consciousness to our actors, can give directions to our writers."¹⁷ As a committed playwright and director, Milner felt the bad need for a black theatre. It is one thing to read something in a book, it is another to see it.

Apparently, Milner felt the necessity for more involvement in the black theatre. He ardently believes that the black theatre in general and local community theatres in particular can help to unify the black community. "Theatre lifts a community in more ways than one," Milner says to Geneva Simitherman, only to proceed:

The idea of seeing yourself magnified and dramatized on stage gives you a whole perspective on who you are and where you are. You can isolate your emotions and thoughts and bring them to a place and ritualize them in an audience of people who empathize with you.¹⁸

Milner stresses the urgent need for local community theatres to communicate something valuable to their audiences. Darwin T. Turner, the renowned black theatre critic, justifies the need for these community theatres; he maintains that

perceiving that artistic freedom will be limited as long as the artist must explain his material to an audience unfamiliar with his culture, black dramatists today are writing increasingly for the theatres of the black community. In doing so, they are not seeking dull listeners who will applaud any effort regardless of its ineptness. Instead, they are seeking perceptive audiences who are culturally capable of understanding and evaluating their efforts.¹⁹

To Milner, the black theater is considered the best weapon to face the whites' oppression. So, he is taking care of the black theater. The black theatre, Turner concludes, "is an assertion of the fact that the black playwright, like any other author, has the right to create for his own culture, "for he / she" wants and needs audiences which understand the culture which forms the background of his drama."²⁰ Perhaps the most powerful statement in that respect is Jim Williams's. Williams argues that to

expect Negro acting and play-writing to flourish without a Negro theatre is like asking a farmer to grow vegetables without roots in the soil. You may get the

vegetables but, man, they sure will be stunted.²¹

Milner agrees with Robert Macbeth, director of the New Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, when the latter identifies the black theatre's task. According to Macbeth, that task is

to show Black people who they are, where they are, and what condition they are in. the people, the community. The culture itself is the only entity that can cure its ills.²²

Milner wittingly justifies his belief in the moralistic message of black theatre. He maintains:

I don't think black people, people in a crisis, can afford a theatre that is merely artifact or entertainment. It has to have a functional effect. Like the African artist: He carves a stool you can sit on, or a spoon you can use.²³

That is why most of his plays are designed to educate the masses of blacks to understandings which must characterize their actions. Thus, it is quite natural that Milner does not believe in theatre for its own sake. Rather, he believes:

Theatre for theater's sake is incest. It gets thinner and thinner each time and drifts off into abstraction. But when it's directly involved in life, even when it's badly done, it can cause people to argue, discuss, grow, or at least clarify where they stand.²⁴

Milner concedes that "it's true, the aesthetic side can do something for you spiritually. But you can't let that prevent you from communicating on a basic level."²⁵ This is reminiscent of Kenneth Tyrant's statement describing art which ignores social questions as "a shrinking flower that conspires at its own death by ignoring the soil in which it grows."²⁶

Art, according to Milner, must be functional, collective and committing. That is why he discarded the concept of "art-for-art's- sake." For him, the main function of art is to implant in the black people a sense of moral commitment and make them aware and proud of their history and their identity. This is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht who proclaims

that "the main thing is to teach the spectator to reach a verdict."²⁷ Like Brecht, Milner's didacticism is wrapped within a deep concern for human nature; *The Good Woman of Sezuwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945), two of Brecht's finest plays, though didactic in tone, are less concerned with teaching a political lesson than with celebrating human nature. Like Brecht, Milner does not seek to replace aesthetic judgment by the criterion of social utility. Both criteria go hand in hand; for Milner is consciously aware of C.W.E. Bigsby's syllogism:

If there is some justice in Richard Wright's comment that "all literature is protest," there is more justice in James Baldwin's retort that "all protest was not literature." So that it becomes apparent that the committed writer is capable of producing valid drama only in so far as he is able to subordinate immediate social and political objectives to a concern with "the whole man".²⁸

"The degeneration of didacticism into assertive propaganda." Bigsby regrets, "resulted in plays which are of interest today solely as sociological documents."²⁹ Milner aimed his dramas to leave the audience with a new sense of esteem for self and culture. Much of his stamina and prowess are devoted to defining and establishing a unique black theatre. According to him, "Black theatre is ... about the destruction of tradition, the traditional role of Negroes in white theatre. "If this theatre is to be," Milner and his co-editor, Woodie King observe, in the introduction to *Black Drama Anthology*, "it must psychologically, mentally, aesthetically and physically, go home."³⁰ By going home, they mean returning to the experiences that have given blacks their identity and moral support. For black theatre is about the destruction of tradition. Milner's theatre, as he rhetorically puts it,

Will be a theatre having to do with love of one's self, and one's personal, national and international family; with wariness and hatred of one's personal, national and international enemies; with, ideally, points as to how to break grip and splatter their power.³¹

Milner clarifies the "going-home" concept even further. He maintains:

"Theatre" and "play" have always meant going to see somebody else's culture and seeing how you could translate it into your own terms. People always felt they were going to a foreign place for some foreign reason. But now there is a theatre written to them, of them, for them and about them.³²

Milner sought to redefine the goals of contemporary black American theatre by affirming the importance of traditional familial and moral values and self-determination. Thus, his plays represent a unified attempt at communicating to the black neighborhood a serious message of the importance of solidarity. Believing that significant art must be functional rather than merely entertaining or diverting, Milner proposes to educate his black brethren to awareness of their condition and needs; most urgent of which is the need for a positive self-image. His art, however, never deteriorates into pure didacticism. For he is well aware that pure didacticism detracts from the effect of the message being conveyed; or David Richards (1975), Milner states:

For along time, black critics dwelled on our negative history. They could never see any real victory. For them, the only victory lay in the ability to endure defeat. I was consciously trying to break that. I function a great deal on what I intuitively feel are the needs of the time. And the needs of the time are for the positive.³³

By speaking directly and honestly to his black people, Milner is a major proponent of a distinct black aesthetics where speaking honestly is a fundamental principle of the black artist. He has given up the futile practice of speaking to whites, and has begun to speak to his brothers. Addison Gayle, in an attempt to demarcate the black aesthetic, points out that "the problem of the de-Americanization of black people lies at the heart of the black aesthetic." Gayle elaborates:

The question for the black critic today is not how more beautiful is a melody, a play, a poem, or a novel, but how much more beautiful has the poem, melody, play or novel made the life of a single black man? How far has the work gone in transforming an American Negro into an African American or black man?³⁴

Actually, the black aesthetic, as adopted and conceived by Gayle, is a corrective means; i.e. a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism. The same is true with Ron Milner who seems to be attempting a continuing dialogue with black people. His intended audience is obviously black, but instead of expressing the plight of black people as a means of edifying white people, or rather delectating them, Milner seeks to express black experiences as a means of edifying blacks first and whoever else can understand them second. Milner, in short, turns his attention inward, seeking to identify the traditions of black people, to explore their experiences, and to define himself and his people in imagery which grows out of their individual quests and group explorations. For he vows commitment to black thought and perspectives, rather than to convention and "art for art's sake." Therefore, Milner's dramas are free but part of their freedom embraces an urgent responsibility to the black community, making it functional as a tool for liberation. According to Milner, art, in general, and drama, in particular, should have a function; namely to edify black people as to be responsible members in their community. In that particular respect, Milner seems to be highly impressed by W. E. B. DuBois, who sends black dramatists a message to present valid and human portraits of black people.

In a speech delivered to the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People); concerning the use of art, DuBois stated:

The apostle of Beauty becomes the apostle of Truth and Right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion. Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he

is denied the right to tell the Truth of recognize an ideal of Justice. Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the calling of the purists. I stand in utter shameless-ness and say that whatever art I have for writing had been used always for propaganda and for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.³⁵

Thus, the creative artist is free in as much as he is motivated by his quest for "Truth" and "justice". It is of vital importance here that the concept of "propaganda" presented by DuBois, should not be misinterpreted by creative artists as extremist didacticism; rather, it aims at "gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy ". As DuBois himself points out. It is to be remembered, though, that DuBois is a sociologist (he got his Ph. D. in sociology) and not an artist-Milner is influenced by the essence of his writings; he is not, however, a blind imitator. Milner is a playwright whose art seems from, and responds to, the lives of his black people.

Michael Coleman views black theatre as an entity that "actually deals with the lives of Black people. It is a theatre that actually functions to liberate Black people."³⁶ Throughout his dramatic career, Milner has aimed at achieving two main objectives: The elevation of black consciousness and the eradication of the negative black image. Milner wants to open the minds of his black people, to emphasize their strengths and their beauty, and to enhance their self-respect.. Milner hoped to use his theatre as a corrective; he aspired to use his theatre to spur blacks into recommended action. As viewed by people like David L. Hay and James F. Howell a for any drama to be significant, it must speak to each of us in some way..³⁷ Sidney Finkelstein's statement about the achievements of contemporary "American Negro literature" as he calls it, holds true for Milner's literary career and literary stance. Finkelstein admits :

Of the achievements of contemporary American Negro literature, aside from its artistic values, is its service in liberating the Negro people from the public image in

which they have been cast not only by racists but well-meaning friends who shape the image to fit their own drives and frustrations.³⁸

This holds true for Milner's work, because it has both the artistically aesthetic value, together with its share in the eradication of the negative self-image among many of his black people. His dramas are more than a presentation of life or "a slice of life". Though viewed by people like David L. Hay and James F. Howell as "a representation of some aspect of life," drama is "not life itself but stands for something the author wishes to say about human existence," as they further point out. "For any drama to be significant," Hay and Howell conclude"; it must speak to each of us in some way: it must be universal."³⁹ Such criteria pertain closely to Milner's dramas. His dramatic works are highly significant and communicatively impressive.

Thus, Milner's plays are not only reflections of black life as it is, they are also consciously didactic in that they try to show black people the beauty of blackness. Milner's works transcend insularity and achieve a unity of social vision and significant literary form. Unlike many dramatists of the 1960s who wrote confrontational protest plays, Ron Milner focused on quieter dramas that stress family ties and individual integrity. In his informative article, "Anger and the Contemporary Black theatre," Robert J. Willis, having negated that "all black playwrights see revolution as the only means to achieve (their) goal, "supports this viewpoint by setting Ron Milner as an example. In Willis's words, Ron Milner" has written *Who's Got His Own*, which psychically redirects the energy of the oppressed to legitimate manhood and morality". Willis concludes by deducing that" when conditions allow other black playwrights to move beyond a limiting concern with anger, they can then devote their talent to exploring themes as universal as those of any other world dramas."⁴⁰ Willis obviously believes that Milner has got beyond that "limiting concern with anger" and protest so that he released his mind from such shackles and flatters that naturally hinder the power of innovative and creative expression. In so doing, Milner's talent was free to soar high into infinite horizons. Clayton Riley reiterates this aspect. Riley is

of the view point that Milner's dramas are best described as calm because they are mostly family dramas. He emphatically asserts that "Milner's forte and primary concern is the black family."⁴¹ Mr. Riley maintains that:

Through Milner, the movement in Black Arts has come to recognize and turn toward, instead of away from, the central ingredients that shaped so many Black personalities. The family as a Black crucible where so much was formed-and perhaps deformed as well-becomes a phenomenon from which new strengths can be derived.⁴²

According to Beunyce Rayford Cunningham, Ron Milner is a high-caliber family dramatist whose "intense expression and psychological probing joined with a deep regard for the urban family have made (him) a pioneering force in the contemporary Afro-American theatre. "Milner sought to reaffirm the importance of traditional family values and self-determination. He states: "We are at the end of a catharsis ... We're no longer dealing with "I am somebody" but more of what that "somebody" really is."⁴³

Many of Milner's plays involve individuals struggling to maintain their moral beliefs while confronted by crime, drugs and racism-as best illustrated by the limited opportunities-that plague their black community. Even a cursory reading of his plays suffices to tell us that their author can rightfully be termed a moralist. His protagonists are often forced to choose between two opposing trends: good or evil. According to Darwin T. Turner, Ron Milner is identifiably familiar with both varieties of Black Arts Theatre: Theatre of Black Experience and Black Revolutionary Theatre; the former is a theatre in which the dramatist, creating realistic, multi-dimensional characters, examines and diagnoses but does not resolve problems of black life. The latter is a theatre in which the dramatist uses allegorical figures and suggests solutions to a problem facing the black community.⁴⁴

Milner's incarnation of morality through some of his plays

Who's Got His Own is a drama of Blacks between family members living in a Detroit ghetto by the return of a wayward son. The play focuses on a black family and the theme of black manhood. After a four-year absence, Tim Bronson, Jr., returns home to attend the funeral of his father, a man he has hated all his life. In a dramatic confrontation with his mother and sister Clara, he learns for the first time about his father's tragic past: when his father was a little boy, he witnessed the rape of his mother and his father's murder at the hands of a white mob. Tim and Clara come to see their hateful father as a human being who, unable to fight racial oppression, turned his anger on himself and on his family. "what is primarily at issue in the play," observes Beunyce Rayford Cunningham, "is the question of black manhood, the expression of which has historically been thwarted."⁴⁵

The family in *Who's Got His Own* is in quest for its conscience, or rather its definition of life. The basic conflict is internal since Tim and his family are forced to examine the inner fabric of their lives-the lies, self-deceits, and the sense of powerlessness in a white world. Milner affirms the need for an existence of love within a black family. The detestable world of the play is salvageable only if it is supplied with visions of love, manhood, and a good moral life. In Larry Neal's words, "*Who's Got His Own* is not the work of an alienated men. Milner's main thrust is directed toward unifying the family around basic moral principles toward bridging the "generation gap." Lofton Mitchell felt Milner was suggesting in this play "that nothing in America has changed in terms of the black experience." The play is a self-celebration drama, almost like a folk tale, that feeds from the life experience and the style of African Americans. It is a play of self-knowledge that moralizes through revelation and persuasion. Rather than futilely protesting against whites, Milner wanted his play to be a vivid expression of unrest with racial injustice, with a hint

that blacks have their own share in the dilemma. Family unity and pride constitute the theme that informs Milner's play which shows a black family forced by the death of the father to investigate its powerlessness in determining for itself every aspect of its life.

Milner's one-act, *M (ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom* (1971), is a symbolic play. The green ball of freedom can only be obtained through co-operation and the giving up of one's ego. It is a play about the importance of self-denial in the construction of a whole-some society. It is a ritual chant in which the "ball of freedom" is passed throughout the audience. Milner calls it a delightful visual image. "When it was done at a Muhammad Ali rally,, the crowd became so obsessed with touching that ball that Kim Weston could not even start singing.⁴⁶ Milner wants the young blacks to cast off the ill-fitting image of themselves, fashioned for years by the white racists, and to accept themselves proudly as black and beautiful. He wants his black people to have self-confidence. He tells his people that they are good and righteous and that by their will and strength black power is a reality not a dream. For after having a firm foothold in their culture and selves, the black masses and intelligentsia will naturally transcend the suffocating narrowness of their dreadful *status quo*, and celebrate the coming of a new epoch where all will be free to grow in an unrepressed, loving world, Milner likes to teach by example. In 1986, he wrote the one and only exclusively biographical play, *Roads of the Mountaintop*. He chose to write about Martin Luther King whose electrifying speeches and charismatic personality impressed him greatly. He used to speak reverently of Dr. King. For instance, Milner characterized the fifties as a "a time of spiritual progress," when men like Martin Luther King, Jr. "gave people the courage to stand up and say" no."⁴⁷

The "Green Ball of Freedom" can only be achieved through a process of sacrificial co-operation. It is a ritual in which a group of dancers discover that they cooperate and give up their own egos. The play, in fact, can not reach, the "Green Ball of freedom" without the great importance of self-denial in the construction of a wholesome

society. But the play presents itself to us as a ritual chant in which the "ball of freedom" is passed throughout the audience. Milner calls it a "delightful visual image. As such, the elements of music and lighting are exploited in a unique way, adding more interest to the meaning of the play this is quite clear in the stage directions:

(Moans, shouts, screams, lights whirl as in riots or jail- breaks) (This is repeated with matching music perhaps just drums- as dancers suddenly dart from one corner of the stage after another ...) (Set-up painful, humming, moaning sense, Music becomes oppressive, then empathetic- reflecting the victims pain.) (From three corners of stage light picks up crawling victims personifying resignation to degradation, reaction to pain – as music moans on. Lights still dim).⁴⁸

The play opens with a total darkness reflecting the sad state of blacks, with their perplexity and confusion. Only voices are audible, or rather "amplified". The first words uttered by these "voices" are:

Slavery!!!

Oppression!!!

Deg-ra-day-shun!!! degradation)

Death! Death! Death!!! (p.40).

To look at the opening scene of the play is to see the darkness. In fact, such darkness reflects the deep suffering of Blacks. The quadratic division of these cares and complaints necessitates the adoption of action to overcome them. The shouts of the "amplified of positive voice" are accompanied with "matching music-perhaps just drums" (p.40). These last musical instruments are reminiscent of the African traditions. Then there is "the painful humming, moaning sense ... reflecting the victims pain" (p.41).

Although the beginning is pessimistic and sad, there is always a scope for optimism and hope- as is always the case in the moralities. As a way out of the blacks' dilemma of slavery, oppression and degradation, comes the cry for Freedom. Male and Female voices unite in their outcry "Freedom". With

that cry there is the sense of riot of Jail-breaks as a signal for blacks to exert every effort and try their best to remove the shackles of slavery. Now, there are two distinct groups of voices; the first group cries sadly: "oppression, degradation, death;" the second tells them and shows them the way out-through Freedom". There is a background of riots, shots and death to enhance the feeling of the mandatory necessity of freedom. At that moment, "dancers dance on-only the three now racing, running, looking, frantically for "freedom" (p.41)." Suddenly lights pick up bright green ball hanging from overhead. All three stop and point up! Lights brighten" (p.42). Now all voices cry "Freedom". The mere scene of freedom make the dancers jump with extreme joy. They hug each other and react joyfully. Now music and dancers become at once ecstatic and anxious. Freedom, the way out, is now visible but seemingly unreachable. The dancers jump frantically in serious attempts to touch it but it is just beyond the grasp of their fingertips. Milner signifies the importance of cooperation: alone, one can not achieve freedom; only hand, in hand, the process becomes simple and feasible.

The dancers see the "ball of freedom" but sadly recognize that they can not even touch it individually. Upon realizing this, "dancers become almost panicky now; they can not reach the ball, the sirens are starting again. There are more shots.. (p.42). The back ground of sirens and shots reflects the state of Frustration experienced by the dancers because of their failure to grasp the ball. The feeling of confusion, perplexity and utter loss prevails. In the pattern of a morality, however, this is not the end of it. The darkest hour is that before dawn; there is always scope for hope and optimism. One of the three dancers has got a brilliant idea:

He shows others how if two put their hands together, they can make a ladder for the other one to get up; then the one up on the ball can secure himself and reach down for the others. (p.42)

Here, one of the three dancers, He is Milner, has got a god idea, it is co-operation that is, if blacks co-operate, they can face white demon. The above mentioned quotation shows the bad need to be one

hand. The other two dancers agree that it is a good idea and that it is the solution; "now two must put their hands together, one must go up!!" (p.42) The audience experiences a sense of relief at reaching such a conclusion. However, that feeling is only momentary. Schism and dissention emerge amongst the three dancers as to who should go first. A sense of disappointment and discomfiture fills the air and shrouds the whole place. Sirens start again as an ominous background for the hesitation, heated argumentation and dissention prevalent on the stage.

The scene of the dissention touches the heartstrings of the audience. It is a heart-to-heart communication of the real cause of black's retarded *status quo*. That particular scene is charged with meanings:

Voices. (off stage)

No, me go, first!!

Me go first

No! Me go!! Me go, first!!

You no go!! Me go!!

Me go!!

(Dancers are tugging, each one trying to force the other two to put their hands together but refusing to do so himself.

Voices and Dancers fight rise together in tempo.)

You no go, first!!! Me go first!!

Me go first!!! First me go!!!

First me go!!! First me go!!!

(Repeats) (PP. 42-3)

What that scene, there is a crescendo of sirens and shots

By saying "Me go first" this means that "me" as a black one should be the first one attacking and facing the white demon. Every black one should sacrifice himself for the sake of all blacks. That crescendo of sirens is deliberate and intentional. It has a great dramatic function. Milner seems to send a serious warning, to his black people against

dissension; they have to cling to one another if they are sincerely willing to achieve any kind of freedom Sirens and shots become so deafeningly loud as "dancers become more anxious-knocking each other down even as they try to pull each other up and make other two put hands together" (p.34. the ominous siren goes on with the frantic shouts:

Me go first!! Me-Go!

Me Go!! Me Go!! Mee-Goo!!

E Goe!! E Go !!! E Gooo!!! (p.34)

The shouts of "Me Go" dissolve into cries of "Ego!!" Milner stresses the serious danger of egoism, selfishness and self-centricity. The use of music at that particular point is highly efficient in communicating Milner's moralistic message.

What deepen the sense of frustration and disappointment, at the dancers' failure to unite, cooperate and experience a sense of philanthropy and altruism, are the cries of other voices: "Oppression-Degradation-Death," (p.34) and the female voices' weak, pitiful cries for freedom. At the time of crisis, good people should forget about themselves as individuals and focus only on the welfare, prosperity and goodness of the whole community at large. Milner hails the importance of self-denial and denounces egoism.

Milner's *M (ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom* stresses the great value of solidarity and unity in facing the white demon. Believing firmly in the validity of the Aristotelian critical dictum "Contraries set off each other", Milner the vividly depicts the essential need for unification by demonstrating the futility of dispersed individual endeavors. One of the three dancers attempts to reach the "ball of freedom" on his own, seeking no help from his colleagues. He rolls over on back, struggles to one elbow and reaches up for the ball. With a weak egoistic cry, "Me Go!! E Go!!!," he rolls over and dies. His tragic end is a great threat to all egoistic and selfish people lest they should face the same destiny. The last word uttered by him, "E Go", is significant in demonstrating how far one may go with his / her egoism. The sad point about it is the futility of the attempt; the dancer practically dies for nothing.

What aggravate the matter and deepen the sense of loss are those cries of "oppression-degradation-death" which are still audible. On the other hand a female voice cries though feebly: "Freedom-Freedom" (P. 34). The voices crying "death" are much Louder. A suffocating atmosphere, filled with despondency and despair, prevails on the dramatic level, this is illustratively depicted through the stage being "black for a moment" (P.44). The blackness of the stage reflects the utter sense of bewilderment and confusion.

Fulfilling the morality pattern, the "blackness" of the stage is just momentary. Typical of the morality play, the dead dancer miraculously reappears with a determined will to seek the interest of the whole. This is reminiscent of Medwall's *Nature* where Man, at the beginning, acts rashly admission of his guilt.

The crisis of schism and dissension acts as the crucible from which the three dancers are born anew. They are no longer selfish or egoists. Now they focus on the end, not the means. That is why they easily achieve their target.

As the three figures form pyramid ladder, one climbing onto shoulders of others; top figure attains green ball, climbs down with it from shoulders of others... (P. 44)

Through this quotation, one tends to say that they are no longer selfish. That is, to be free and to face the white demon is to be in a kind of focusing on the end not the means. Thus, they could easily achieve their goal that Milner hopes which is free blacks from the white demon. A voice cries: "So simple ... so simple" (P. 44). The cry is repeated as the first dancer hands the ball to the second one who climbs down with ball from shoulders of the third dancer. Now with a sense of relief, they exchange the ball with cordiality and love. They all share the ball for a moment as a voice cries addressing the dancers as well as the audience; the moral message is being communicated in clear-cut terms. within the same pattern of a morality, didacticism, moralizing and preaching are straightforward, explicit and unequivocal:

It is not he who goes first that matters. But that he who achieves returns, to pass to the others, the knowledge, the strength, the way, so that all may be free / so that all may be free. (P. 44)

The second strategy to exorcize the white demon is by knowledge. Knowledge is the strength and the way to freedom from the white demon. The dancers pass the ball to the audience and "it goes from seat to seat, person to person, as a bright symbol of the freedom and unity" (p. 44). The voices again stress the importance of self-effacement and self-denial: "When you and Me become We then all can be Free / all can be Free" (P.44). The audience becomes extremely obsessed with touching the ball and joining in the chant: "when you and me become we, then all can be free / all can be free" (P.44). The ball-which is a symbol of freedom-passes from audience to stage and back again as the chant goes on "when you and me have unity, then all will be free (p. 45). This is reminiscent of Milner's eloquent statement: "we all need to change our commitment from 'I' to 'we' or there won't be any 'I' or 'we'"⁴⁹

The chant of unity and freedom goes on "until suddenly ball is back on stage in center and all on stage clap and stomp once!" (P. 45). Then all shout triumphantly: "In love and need we plant this seed" (P. 45). Though charged with moments of frustration and disappointment, the play-typical of a morality- closes on an optimistic note. With that ritual drama, with the complete unity of both performers and players, the theatre becomes like Albert Camus's, a place where each spectator has "a rendezvous with himself, "where he can experience a self-definition" occasioned by the soliloquies of those large figures who cry out on the stage."⁵⁰

Milner believes that by love and unity, blacks can destroy the white demon. The concluding lines of the play stress the great importance of love as the salvation and redemption of the black people who should cling to one another with love and respect. Analogous to Askia Muhammad Toure who is considered the black poet of love, Milner may rightfully be termed "the dramatist of love". Both Toure and Milner are optimistic in their outlooks,

looking forward to see a bright age and a cheerful world; but

Such an age is only possible after the apocalypse; after the cleansing of the black mind and soul, after a people have undergone the inward odyssey, sifted through the lies and distortions of the past, come to view themselves as new men and women, as earth people, determined to transcend the images offered by the white west.⁵¹

A judicious critic should look at *M (ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom* in its entire and in its main frame of the black aesthetic it represents. In an article entitled "Le Roi Jones and the New Black Writers of the Sixties." Kathryn Jackson explains:

The writers of the new black artistry proudly, defiantly proclaim their identification with the rising Black consciousness ... these writers... hope that their works will be relevant to the ghetto dwellers and that they will be able to direct their readers to black consciousness, black unity, and black power.⁵²

As a proponent of the black aesthetic, Milner is not concerned with labels; what matters to him is the practical message being conveyed. One very important aspect of the Black aesthetic, Jackson maintains, is that its proponents know that their works.

May be called didacticism or propaganda, but they are indifferent to labels put upon it. They consider such labels just another one of the white man's hang-ups and reject them. Likewise, they care not whether their works survive as great achievements of art.

Jackson concludes that "all they are concerned about is its effectiveness in making other blacks conscious of themselves, their beauty (and) their lives."⁵³

In *M (ego) and the Green Ball of Freedom*, Milner uses the ritual form as a suitable technique for communicating his message. He reiterates now and then that while egoism is sinful, self-denial is

redemptive. Knowledge is power and union is strength.

The title is highly significant, both on the phonetically as well as on the orthographical level. M (ego) is a punning on the selfish cries in the scene of dissension "Me Go!" The bracketing of (ego) on the orthographical level further enhances the audible pun. The title predicts and informs the theme of the play; denouncing egoism and selfishness. The "Green Ball of Freedom" is an allegory, recalling the moralities whose essential nucleus is allegorical structure-materializing the immaterial and concretizing the abstract. The green ball is symbolic of freedom. As a symbol, it makes use of visual (green color), tactile and auditory sense (the ball as an object as well as its sound). As a multi-dimensional symbol, the "green ball" is highly significant. It vividly portrays how far and to what extent blacks are obsessed with freedom as a dream. According to Beunyce Rayford Cunningham, this "short, symbolic ritual skit has music and dance as its chief ingredients and consciousness-raising as its aim."⁵⁴

Milner's *What the Wine-Sellers Buy* as a moralistic message

Again, Milner uses his pen and plays in planting good manners in blacks to be able to face the white demon. So, *What the Wine-Sellers Buy*⁵⁵ (1973) is a full-length play charged with morality and moralizing to the extent that critics regard it as "First and foremost a morality play."⁵⁶

It revolves around the seductive attempts at the temptation of a seventeen-year-old Detroit youth, Steve Carlton, by a devilish black pimp and hustler, Rico. The play highlights the desperate moral choices that blacks face in their daily life. According to Douglas Watt, the play is "a slice of Detroit Negro life that boiled over on the stage." Watt hails the play as "a lively piece of theatre by a writer of promise."⁵⁷

Amongst the bulk of Milner's dramas, *The Wine-Sellers* received the highest plaudits. It caught the theatre community completely off-guard. Richard Watts maintains:

If the black drama had contributed nothing to the American theatre except dynamic vitality, there would be reason for welcoming it. It was present in abundance ... in Ron Milner's *What the Wine-Sellers Buy* ... and I thought it was drama's outstanding quality.⁵⁸

Edwin Wilson sees the play as a Further evidence that black playwrights today, like its hero, Steve, are determined to find their own way, in this case, a way to speak out in the theatre.⁵⁹

Lance Morrow views *What the Wine-Sellers Buy* as

essentially a sentimental domestic morality play of wayward youth, a play that is a dramatic refuge from the 1950s. Except that here the characters are black and the setting is the Detroit ghetto.⁶⁰

The play is a testimony that Milner's plays are mostly non-belligerent black drama. His dramas have the effect of relaxing racial tension-Far from being inflammatory drama of anger, his is a calm drama that shakes up the old cliché portrayal of blacks as victims and whites as victimizers. The author hardly raises his voice and his efficiency is all the stronger because of his quietness.

The *Wine-Sellers* is about blacks, presenting them with authenticity. Characters are consistent. The playwright seems to have delved deep into their psyches so that by the end of the play we have learned what it feels to live in the ghetto. In the play Milner sought to write a play that would be relevant to the black audience and would at the same time be palpable to the white audience. Milner seems, to echo Lorraine Hansberry's outcry:

We come from the angry culture of an oppressed people Negro dramatists burn to fight the cause. They show the Negro as all good and the white man as all bad. That isn't truth.⁶¹

Milner attempts to write about characters without condescension. He handles the ordinary blacks believing that there are truths which are extremely self-evident. Milner's life in the ghetto made him communicate honestly and fully with a deeper examination and understanding of what he saw and

heard. He did his best in translating his intellectual powers into communicatively readable works of art. He wants to reeducate deluded Blacks; communicating a vision of truth and beauty to his black people. Believing in the utilitarian aspect of art. Milner uses drama as a means of effecting the spiritual, psychological and cultural liberation of his black people.

In *The Wine-Sellers*, Rico-a vainglorious pimp-seduces those around him to trade morality for material gain. He shares the apartment with the Carlton family; Steve Carlton- a high school boy-and his mother, Laura Carlton. When the family desperately needs money, Rico suggests that Steve uses his fiancée, Mae, as a prostitute. Steve is a prototype of Everyman. Steve as a mankind figure, is flanked by representatives of good and evil, reminiscent of the *Bonus Angelus* and *Mauls Angelus* in the *Castle of perseverance*. The play depicts the pressures on the seventeen-years-old Detroit high school students, Steve. He is under the pressure, of poverty and need, to try the hustler's life and to start by turning his own girlfriend, Mae, into a prostitute. Milner was partially influenced by the movie, *Superbly*. He sadly recalls:

I've actually seen a 10 – year old boy sniffing salt-not cocaine, he didn't have any concept of what cocaine was but salt, because he wanted to look like super fly. You see enough cases of this and it suddenly becomes important enough to write about.⁶²

But Milner admits that there are biographical elements in Steve Carlton's situation:

A similar incident happened to me when I was young. But I think I would have just passed over it, except that I saw the same thing happening to other guys as well-young guys who were clear headed, and intelligent, and able to achieve, suddenly using all their energies to turn over dope. They'd bought a system of values that says anything you do to get a car or money or clothes is all right.⁶³

Rico is the apotheosis and epitome of that value system. He acts as the bad Angel of the morality play. Throughout the play, he endeavors to corrupt the innocent Steve-But then Rico, as Beunyce RayFord Cunningham observes, "serves as an indictment of the American businessman in particular and of American society in general." Cunningham quotes Milner as saying.

The people who pollute the air and water for profit have no right to point fingers at Rico ... When he talks about everything for profit trading everything for money, he's talking about society.⁶⁴

Rico, however, is the devil incarnated. He seems to substitute not only the Bad Angel but the Vices altogether of the moralities. Mrs. Laura Carlton, Steve's mother, and Jim Aaron, the deacon and the general contractor who is a friend of hers act as a foil to Rico. They both try their best to take Steve out of Rico's stinky swamp. Rico's devilish net at the beginning seems to supersede, typical of a morality play where vices usually attain temporary triumph. Steve loses his father, shot dead by police, when he was a small child; he was only about three years old. He has no father-figure; that is why he turns to Rico for a father. The latter is seen as "a modern Mephistopheles who argues that the only way a black man can get a head is to have money and the only way to get money is through illegal means."⁶⁵ As the embodiment of vices in the moralities, Rico is both clever and persuasive.

In *The Wine-Sellers*, the infamous Street is vividly and realistically depicted; with dope, prostitution, hustling ... etc. Winos are scattered here and there. The setting is so honestly realistic that one memorably gets the feeling of what it is like to live in the ghetto and, in particular, in Hastings Street in Detroit, Michigan. As a poverty stricken youth Steve is always in want of money. His mother works herself to death for his sake so as to bring him up like a responsible man. She even, next to her job, to iron clothes and prepare meals for the tenants in return for little money to support her son, Laura Carlton is a religious type; she cannot stand hustlers; her husband being one. She wisely senses the bad influence the pimp Rico may exercise over her son. She warns him against Rico's company:

Steve (to Rico). She told me to stay away from you ... She was gonna' move out when you moved in.⁶⁶

However, Steve seems heedless of his mother's advice and as such runs errands for Rico in return for money. He even shines his shoes. Steve has to pay a fine of fifteen dollars to school, for sneaking to get some donuts at lunch time. Rico takes the chance and gives the money to Steve which makes him tied to his apron. Immediately, Rico assumes the role of Steve's teacher; misguiding him in every respect:

When a sucker thinks he's got you down, that's when you show him yon' knife. (P.7)

Rico's account of his familial background is touching. His circumstances seemed to have over-powered him:

Rico (to Steve)... I am a pimp ... that's Hastings Street out there And you think it's something' now? Should a seen it when I was comin'up, you couldn't a stood it. Sheet. You think you an 'yo' old lady, po'? Sheet. Long as I been here I ain't never seen you go to bed on empty stomach. But me an' my three brothers and for' sisters? Hell, we used to try to hurry-up an' get to sleep, "cause when one stomach start growling" it remind all the others that they ain't ate shit, either ... that's exactly how it was.(P.11)

In a confessional style, reminiscent of *Confession* in the morality play, Rico admits:

I wanted to be a pimp, soon as I heard that's what they called 'em, you dig? Yeah, wasn't nothing' else to be but one' a them dudes like my daddy, carrying' his lunch in one' them brown paper sacks. (p.11)

He goes on telling Steve how he used to wear old, beat-up brogans in his first year at high school till he got tired of people laughing at him with "the cardboard covering the holes" (P.11) and the socks showing from underneath. He had to quit shining shoes. The problem with Rico is that he has so absorbed the materialistic and pragmatic philosophy that his value system has been badly distorted. His

moment of truth where he confesses his past experiences does not lead to repentance which is a prerequisite for salvation. That is why religious people, like Mrs. Carlton, have to go away from him. They cannot stand talking to, or even looking at, him.

Mae Harris, Steve's girlfriend, is also subject of harassment and temptations by hustlers in the street. The harassment reaches the point of almost rape. She is saved at the last minute. This is a foreshadowing of what would happen to her later when she reluctantly follows the schemes of Steve to go with Old Bob for money. In both cases, she is miraculously saved. Mae's saving is providential. It happens through the intervention of God's mercy. This is typical of the moralities. The timely intervention of woman calling for the police in the former and Steve's retreat in the latter are reminiscent of the timely intervention of Good Deeds in *Everyman* and Mercy in *Mankind* to save the play's name-sake protagonists, (*Supra*, PP. 32, 38)

The Steve-Rico and Mae-hustler scenes are meant as foils to one another. The structure is reiterative for a dramatic purpose. Milner's device of repetitions heightens the tension. The play builds up to a powerful climax, and conveys the anguish of the disintegrated black ghetto.

The structure of *The Wine-Sellers* is typical of that of a morality play. The pattern of inexperience of innocence/ sin/repentance/ salvation is strictly observed. In this way, the play bears great resemblances to moralities in general and most particularly, to *Munds et Infans* where Rico is *Munds* initiating the child, Steve, into the world of experience. Steve or the child imitates *Munds* in every respect. By so doing, Steve is a sinner. He goes so far as to sell "Mae' for money. By the end, however, he is miraculously saved and the play closes on an optimistic note for both Steve and Mae. The morality features are enhanced through the reference to Rico with the Biblical symbol of sin; namely, "the snake" (p.16). In response to Steve's question, "why you – you ought to see yourself. You get all wild. All upset, about- about nothing," his mother angrily replies:

About nothing "... Come home and yo" son been put out at school. And playing with a snake right in yo own kitchen. And you call that nothing. A *snake*, that's what he is. I'm gonna move. I swear. We jus goon move outtalk here... gone 'tell that landlord one more time-either that Rico get out here or I am! (P.16)

From the above mentioned quotation, the word "snake" is a symbol of the white demon. Blacks should get rid of the white demon. So , Milner here makes whites as snakes, that is they are trying to kill and destroy blacks. Later in the play, Mr. Jim Aaron – the mother's friend – refers to Rico as a snake:

I wonder what *snakes* do when it gets cold? ... I know rats just make a hole an' come on in the house to eat off other people ... sometimes they make a meal off some body's baby. (P. 65)

Both Laura Carlton, Steve's mother, and Jim Aaron, her friend, are religious. They represent the virtues in the morality play. The former tried her best to raise her son appropriately. Her mission was to raise her boy; "trying to raise a boy around here on these streets ain't no nothing" (P.17). She is critical of the immoral circumstances surrounding their area, "it's like there's some kind of fever out there ... Yes, a fever to get that rich stuff in the movies.. (P.17). Even when she fell ill, she rejects Rico's help. She is a God fearing woman, reminiscent of Cora Bronson in *who's Got His Own*. Jim Aaron, on the other hand, is more than an equal for Rico. He does his best to keep Steve away from Rico, the hustler. Steve's internal conflict, to adopt Rico's style or to go straight and finish school, reaches its apex when his mother falls sick and he has no money to buy the prescription. Rico gives him the money and finds it a suitable chance to poison his thoughts. In a devilish style, he hits hard on the hot iron:

Yo mama's in there suffering. Done damn near worked herself to death with them grays for yo' lilass. An you don't know what you goon do about it?.. (P.39)

The sickness of the mother here is the sickness of all blacks. It is the demon, the white demon inside the

blacks' minds. One tends to say that the moralistic message send by Ron Milner through his plays is that , to get rid of the white demon , blacks have to be one hand. Whites , to Milner, are big and strong demons. By manners, good manners and good behavior, blacks could easily exorcize this demon. The abundance of morality and moralizing has led some critics to label Milner a "moralist," and even a "preacher." Milner is not at all discouraged by the criticism. Rather, he regards it as a compliment. He strongly believes that art "has to educate as well as entertain." He states: "When people call me a preacher, I consider it a compliment ... When you get an emotional response, it's easier to involve the mind."⁶⁷

Conclusion

This study concluded that since his early childhood, Milner has been obsessed with the dilemma of his black community. When he was still a high school student, he decided to become a writer so that he could tell the story of his people and direct a moralistic message to them. Writing seemed to him then the salvation and redemption. Whenever he saw the deteriorating circumstances of his black brethren, he felt guilty; he had to do his commitment to writing in an objectively analytical way. Even at such an early age, Milner realized the people on Hastings Street had a story to tell. At that time, the fifties and sixties, the oppressive shadows of slavery were still hovering over black/white relations in the United States. These shadows were mainly represented in the cruel discrimination in employment and segregation in housing and education. During that turbulent and perturb able, and precarious period, the Black Arts Movement, basically a moralistic movement which centered on the black artist's attempts at defining the world in his own terms, came into being.

The researcher also found out that analyzing some of Ron Milner's plays, his moral message to the blacks in general, and to the black youth in particular, is to reject the ill-fitting negative self-image fashioned for years by the white man; and to accept themselves as black and beautiful. As a black playwright, Milner has utilitarian motives to seek; he sustains emphasis upon purpose. He warns

his black people to accept full moral responsibility for their needs. The morality pattern captivated him with its optimistic formula: innocence, sin, repentance and salvation. Milner sounds under the spell of such a pattern which necessitates repentance as a prerequisite for salvation. When Humanum Genus in The Castle of Perseverance or Mankind in the morality that bears his name repent, they express for the first time- after a sinful life- a sense of moral responsibility. Moral commitment leads to their salvation and redemption. Milner wants his people to be morally committed to one another, to their cause and to their community at large.

Moreover, It was found that certain speech acts are frequently linked to Milner's message of morality. That's Milner's dramas teach black people to be morally sound; this is achieved through the elevation of black consciousness and the eradication of the negative black image. For Milner wants his plays to pump new life into the dead veins of self-demanding blacks. Accordingly, he uses the inner eye of his conscience like the lens of movie camera. He educates and culturizes his black audience. His belief is that didacticism is the vehicle through which black theatre may spread the concepts of the reawakened sense of moral commitment. As such, his plays are not only reflections of black life as it is; they are also consciously didactic in trying to show black people how to better their life.

Furthermore, the study also revealed that Milner's dramas demonstrate his full identification with the black masses, rejection of Euro-American cultural values and their replacement with a sound moral value system. He aims at the recultivation of the traditional African collective communal concept of the "we" as opposed to the individualistic, more western, "I"; as Milner himself eloquently says and assures or there won't be any "I" or "we". Accordingly, his plays are means of affecting social change; aspiring to the more idealistic task of affecting the masses of black people with a new sense of being and spiritualism. They simply teach black people to cling to one another, forgive each other and abide to a reliable code of ethics.

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