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MUMBO JUMBO AND THE USES OF PARODY

The reader familiar with Ishmael Reed's fiction will recognize his novels as parodies of popular narrative forms: *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* follows the structure of the whodunit; *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* shatters the conventions of the western; *Flight to Canada* is a revision of the fugitive slave narrative. In these works, parody, which is usually restricted to the imitation and distortion of literary texts, becomes a medium for social and literary satire. One consistent element in Reed's fiction to date has been his use of parody—which is directed inward, toward the text—to examine the extra-literary systems that are the province of satire. Nowhere does Reed blend his parodic and satiric intentions better than in *Mumbo Jumbo*, where he parodies a narrative form (the detective novel) whose identifying quality (the rational search for knowledge) is identical to the social, religious and philosophical principles he finds objectionable in Western culture. *Mumbo Jumbo* is both a satire of Western culture's concern with rationality and an example of the reorientation of older traditions possible under Reed's aesthetics of Neo-Hoodooism.

In parody, the ideal reader reaction occurs when the reader recognizes the discrepancy between the parody and its model, while enjoying the hidden irony involved in the highlighting of certain elements. Parodies of detective fiction are particularly effective because of the formulaic nature of the genre, which allows for only a limited combination of characters, situations, settings, and styles within a given structure.

Detective stories, the narratives "in which the primary interest lies in the methodical discovery, by rational means, of the exact

circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events,"¹ offer a limited number of structural possibilities within what has been described as four "movements":

First, one defines the problem . . . The second phase consists of looking for the evidence as it relates to the crime . . . one moves to a third phase, that of assessing the evidence . . . and . . . a fourth phase that brings the action back to the beginning, in which judgment is passed on the meaning of events, and from this judgment arises the revelation of the identity and more obvious motivation of the criminal.²

Because of the formulaic nature of the genre, a successful detective novel must adhere carefully to the expected pattern in order to fulfill the reader's expectations. Deviating from the pattern means transcending the genre:

As a rule, the literary masterpiece does not enter any genre except perhaps its own; but the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book that best fits its genre. Detective fiction has its norms; to develop them is to disappoint them: to "improve upon" detective fiction is to write "literature," not detective fiction.³

Mumbo Jumbo "improves upon" detective fiction by following its structure while undermining its rationalistic suppositions. In this work, Reed's readers are challenged to the task of interpretation by the evocation of their expectations for a detective story before these expectations are disappointed. They are disappointed primarily by *Mumbo Jumbo* not being a tale of "methodical discoveries by rational means" of the circumstances of a mystery. There are "discoveries" and "means" in the text, but they are hardly "methodical" or "rational" in the way expected of detective fiction.

Structurally, however, the novel follows the pattern expected of the genre being parodied. The model of detective fiction chosen

by Reed is that of the thriller, the type of narrative usually associated with the hard-boiled American tradition. Thrillers differ from whodunits⁴—the most common type of detective fiction—in that they de-emphasize the discovery of the identity of the criminal as the chief aim of the plot, and focus instead on the unraveling of complex webs of conspiracy and murder. Thrillers are characterized by "rapid action, colloquial language, emotional impact, and the violence that pervades American fiction,"⁵ leaving aside the "static calm, the intricate puzzle and ingenious deductions"⁶ of the whodunit.⁷

In *Mumbo Jumbo* Reed has written a story that, at least structurally, reads like a thriller. The plot is a fairly elaborate one that begins with an outbreak of the Jes Grew epidemic, a psychic condition which embodies the freedom and vitality of the Afro-American heritage. The epidemic is in search of its text, which it must find if it is not to evaporate. The text is in the hands of Hinckle Von Vampton, the librarian of the ancient order of the Knights Templar, who is himself being sought by the Wallflower Order. They, in turn, want to find and destroy the text and "sterilize Jes Grew forever." To avoid detection, Hinckle has selected fourteen people and paid them a monthly salary to send the text around to each other in a chain. PaPa LaBas, Reed's detective, summarizes the events that ensue as follows:

Hinckle Von Vampton got a job with the New York *Sun* and it was then that he sent a feeler to the Wallflower Order in the shape of [a] headline exposing their Holy War in Haiti after their mouth-pieces in America had been informed that the story would not be played up. Of course the Wallflower Order investigated to find out who had the goods on them and it turned out to be Hinckle. 1st they ransacked his apartment because they wanted the Book more than they wanted his corpse. . . . He made a deal with them to the effect that his Order would have to be in charge of the Crusade against Jes Grew in order for him to return the Book. . . . Well 1 of the 14 people of the list . . . gave the Book to Abdul. The Text became stationary as Abdul began to translate the Work and this is when Jes

Grew . . . started to move toward Manhattan. . . . [Hinckle] approached Abdul for the Book and when Abdul resisted he murdered him. Abdul left behind an epigram on American-Egyptian Cotton. . . . We deciphered this to mean that the Book was buried beneath the center of the Cotton Club. . . . When we dug up the box containing the Book we found the Templars' seal on the top and we traced it to Hinckle Von Vampton as the scout the Wallflower Order . . . had assigned to create a Talking Android; the 2nd phase of the Wallflower plan, that of creating a "spokesman" who would furtively work to prepare the New Negro to resist Jes Grew and not catch it.⁸

Although structurally Reed follows the basic narrative pattern expected of a thriller, his use of the elements of the genre within this structure systematically undermines the reader's acceptance of *Mumbo Jumbo* as a typical detective story. This systematic undermining takes three forms: the first is the use of the dialectical pattern of detective fiction as the frame-work for the presentation of the author's views on Western culture; the second is the breaking of the internal rational logic of the process of detection; the third is the consistent use of humor to underscore those aspects of Western culture (and detective fiction) Reed finds amusingly objectionable.

The dialectical structure of the thriller is the ideal vehicle for Reed's argument that throughout history, Western culture (which he identifies with Christianity) has used its power to suppress non-Christian cultural manifestations because their sensuality and irrationality were incompatible with Western thought. The novel's main plot offers Reed's evaluation of the fate of Black culture in White America, taking as its basis what Reed calls "the major aesthetic tragedy of Afro-American life in the 20th century—the disappearance of New Orleans Old Music."⁹ In *Mumbo Jumbo*, the ultimate "crime" that PaPa LaBas and Black Herman must prevent is the destruction of Black aesthetic roots (roots which link Afro-American culture to ancient African religion) which are threatened by the representatives of Western culture: the Knights Templar, "the discredited order which once held the fate of Western

civilization in its hands" (73), and the aptly named Wallflower Order. Both stand for what Reed calls elsewhere the "worst facet of Christianity, its attempt to negate all other modes of thought and to insist upon a singularity of moral and ethical vision."¹⁰ The dialectics are those of logic, squareness, lethargy and lack of feeling on the one hand; and emotion, mystery, intuition, and movement on the other. To counter the Christian-Western view of the world, Reed offers Black American folklore and language, African religion and myth. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, they are embodied in the Jes Grew epidemic, a psychic condition which causes the host to do "stupid sensual things," to go into a state of "uncontrollable frenzy." The symptoms are those of possession by a spirit of dance:

He said he felt the gut heart and lungs of Africa's interior. He said he felt like the Kongo: "Land of the Panther." He said he felt like "deserting his master" as the Kongo is "prone to do." He said he felt he could dance on a dime. (8)

The efforts to destroy the Text needed for the epidemic to fulfill itself are thus charged with symbolic significance, as are Hinckle's efforts to create a Talking Android who

. . . will tell the J.G.C.'s that Jes Grew is not ready and owes a large debt to Irish Theater. This Talking Android will Wipe That Grin Off Its Face. He will tell it that it is derivative. . . . He will describe it as a massive hemorrhage of malaprops; illiterate and given to rhetoric. (79)

These efforts support PaPa LaBas' "conspiratorial hypothesis" about a secret society molding the consciousness of the West.

This hypothesis is sustained by the novel's best-developed subplot, which is built around the same concept of cultural dialectics. The Mu'tafikah are "artnappers" bent on plundering museums (here called centers of art detention) and returning "detained" art to the countries of origin. The "conspiracy" (headed by Berbelang and bringing together a multi-ethnic group of art students) is Reed's

comment on the diverging Western and non-Western views of the role of art in society. For the Mu'tafikah, the holding of collections of African, Egyptian, and Amerindian art in American museums has broken the links of these objects with nature, ritual, and mystery. This break is seen as the result of a concerted effort to destroy the fabric of non-Western cultures.

PaPa LaBas and Black Herman's "rational sober" account of Hinckle's crime provides the historical framework in which the Western/non-Western confrontation has developed. The elaborate explanation is offered through a sweeping account of Western culture's on again/off again struggle against non-Western cultures, a struggle which begins with Aton's displacement of Osiris and does not end with the destruction of the Jes Grew text. The conspiracy is unveiled in *Mumbo Jumbo* through the use of historical and pseudo-historical documentation: the background information on the Knights Templar, the murder of Osiris and the defeat of Aton, the villainy of Moses, Warren Harding's involvement in the plot against Jes Grew, the news blackout on the attack on Port-au-Prince by the U. S. Marines, the theory of the orchestration of the 1930's depression as the means of curtailing the progress of Black aesthetics in this country.

Historical and pseudo-historical elements are interwoven in the text in the manner usually found in spy thrillers. Here, their role is that of unveiling a confrontation that is cultural rather than criminal but which (since it is presented within the dialectical structure of the detective story) emerges as an ethical confrontation of good (non-Western) versus evil (Western culture).¹¹

Throughout the novel, Reed points to the West's concern with rationality as the most salient characteristic separating Western and non-Western cultures. Detective fiction, depending as it does on the rational search for truth, epitomizes the culture Reed satirizes in the text. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed sets out to undermine the role of rationality both thematically (by revealing the folly of those characters who act rationally) and structurally (by making his search for truth not dependent on logic or reason). Unlike the traditional detective, whose identifying feature is his ability to connect bits of information in logical patterns through his powers of deduction, Reed's detectives rely on intuition, "knockings" and ritual to arrive at the truth. PaPa LaBas is an "astro-detective" practicing his Neo-Hoodoo therapy in his *Mumbo Jumbo*

Kathedral;¹² Black Herman is a noted occultist. Both are detectives of the metaphysical.

The figure of the detective is linked by Reed in *Conjure* to the battle against Christianity. In the "Neo-Hoodoo Manifesto" he writes:

I have called Jeho-vah (most likely Set the Egyptian Sat-on—a pun on the fiend's penalty—Satan) somewhere a "party-poooper and hater of dance." Neo-Hoodoos are detectives of the metaphysical about to make a pinch. We have issued warrants for a God arrest. If Jeho-vah reveals his real name he will be released on his own recognizance and put out to pasture.¹³

Through these "detectives of the metaphysical" Reed systematically undermines the rational search for knowledge that characterizes detective fiction. The systematic undermining of the process of detection is accomplished primarily by making the process dependent on chance and intuition.

The "discovery" of the Jes Grew text's whereabouts is an example of the unorthodox process of detection in *Mumbo Jumbo*. The clue to the location of the text is found by PaPa on a piece of paper in Abdul's fist when the latter's body is discovered. The message (an "Epigram on American-Egyptian Cotton") is inadvertently decoded by T-Malice as he describes to LaBas the floor show at the Cotton Club. They rush with what they believe to be the text to the assembly of suspects only to open the box at the climactic moment and find it empty. The text sought by so many had been burned by Abdul at the beginning of the search.

Black Herman's clue to the whereabouts of the text comes to him in a dream:

You know the night before he died I had a vision of him attired, on something which resembled a night club floor, he was whirling about the center like a dervish, in the center, he wouldn't move away from that center . . . (150)

The reliance on chance and intuition is accompanied by a rejection of empirical evidence as the way to reach knowledge:

Your conspiratorial hypothesis about some secret society molding the consciousness of the West. You don't have any empirical evidence for it; you can't prove . . .

Evidence? Woman, I dream about it, I feel it, I use my 2 heads. My Knockings. Don't you children have your Knockings, or have you New Negroes lost your other senses, the senses we came over here with? Why your Knockings are so accurate that they can chart the course of a hammer-head shark in the ocean 1000s of miles away. Daughter, standing here, I can open the basket of a cobra in an Indian marketplace and charm the animal to sleep. What's wrong with you, have you forgotten your Knockings? (28)

The dependence on chance and intuition constitutes an important structural break since the rationalistic exercise that is detective fiction does not allow for the intervention of either. Chance and intuition have no legitimacy within the rules of the genre since they break the internal logic of the narrative pattern to which the reader of this type of fiction is accustomed.

The critique of Western culture's concern with rationality implicit in the rejection of the rational process of detection also motivates Reed's attack on Freudian psychology as defender of the rational as opposed to the natural forces in the human psyche. Reed contends that Freud's lack of harmony with the natural world made him unable to see the validity of irrational manifestations.¹⁴ The contrast offered in the text is that between the worldliness of the African cults and the repressive elements in Christianity, as Reed quotes from Jung and St. Clair:

Christianity has never been worldly nor has it ever looked with favor on good food and wine, and it is more than doubtful whether the introduction of jazz into the cult could be a particular asset.

C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*

The African deities were fond of food, drink, battle and sex.

David. St. Clair, *Drum and Candle* (70)

As an alternative to the psychological approach, Reed offers the story of Earline's possession by a loa as an explanation for irrational behavior (she has seduced a bus driver after picking up "the one with the red dress on . . . [the] St. Louis woman," 144) and her exorcism by those who know "The Work" as an alternative to psychoanalysis:

The loa [PaPa LaBas explains] is not a daimon in the Freudian sense, a hysteric; no, the loa is known by its signs and is fed, celebrated, drummed to until it deserts the horse and *govi* of its host and goes on about its business. The attendants are experienced and know the names, knowledge the West lost when the Atonist wiped out the Greek mysteries. The last thing these attendants would think of doing to a loa's host is electrifying it lobotomizing it or removing its clitoris, which was a pre-Freudian technique for "curing" hysteria. (56)

LaBas rejects the notion that Earline has suffered a nervous breakdown, arguing that "nervous breakdown sounds so Protestant" (235). His role in her exorcism emphasizes his folk wisdom and sense of oneness with his world-qualities that set him apart from the traditional detective; from both the fairly eccentric investigator with extraordinary qualities of deduction (that of the classical detective story); and the tough individual characterized by an essential loneliness, with no emotional or social alliances (that of the hard-boiled detective novel). PaPa LaBas and Black Herman are modeled on neither, lacking the comical arrogance of a Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, as well as the feeling of alienation from a degraded society of a Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. Their roots in the ancient rituals and mysteries of their face make them incapable of the feeling of hopelessness usually associated with the hard-boiled detective novel.

The rejection of the prototypes of detective fiction, as well as the rejection of the rational process of detection, are underscored in the novel through the consistent use of humor. Humor is, in fact, one of the basic elements of Reed's Neo-Hoodoo aesthetic, as well as one of the basic elements of Black culture threatened by Western culture:

The African race has quite a sense of humor. In North America, under Christianity, many of them have been reduced to glumness, depression, surliness, cynicism, malice without artfulness, and their intellectuals, in America, only appreciate heavy, serious works. . . . They'd really fallen in love with tragedy. Their plays were about bitter, raging members of the "nuclear Family," and their counterpart in art was exemplified by the contorted grimacing, painful social-realist face. (110)¹⁵

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, the chief source of humor is the parody of the conventions of detective fiction and film. The examples of such parodic exercises abound: there is the gang war in Harlem between Buddy Jackson and "the Sarge of Yorktown" over a numbers and speak operation which ends with Jackson marching the Sarge to the subway, exhorting him to leave Harlem and "never darken the portals of our abode again" (21): or the Cagney-movie atmosphere of the scenes between the Sarge and Biff Musclevwhite, former police commissioner on the take, in one of which the Sarge is gunned down, half of his head scattered in the neighboring dinner plates. The genre is satirized in the parodic portrayal of the Knights Templar as ineffectual gangsters, and of Hinckle and Safecracker as bumbling musclemen. The assembly of suspects which leads to the identification of the culprit, a "must" in the classic detective story, is elaborately parodied in a scene which finds PaPa LaBas and Herman gate-crashing a high society party to arrest Hinckle and Safecracker, only to have the guests refuse to hand them over until they "explain rationally and soberly what they are guilty of" (183).

The humorous themes and techniques Reed uses in these parodic scenes are linked to those of Black comedians such as Dick Gregory, Moms Mabley, Flip Wilson, Godfrey Cambridge, and

Richard Pryor, who use their ethnicity as a source of humorous material. One example of this link is Flip Wilson's technique of parodying famous scenes from history by having one of the characters speak in Southern Negro idiom, which Reed uses frequently in the narration of the story of Isis and Osiris in *Mumbo Jumbo*. The cultural gap between the Western and African traditions and the anachronistic use of language are exploited with comic results in passages such as these:

They hurled missiles at the residence; inside, Moses' mother Thermuthis sobbed softly. She cried the way they did in Greece, civilized, dignified, not the piercing wailing from the viscera associated with the mourning Isis who walked all over Egypt sharing her pathos with her people after her husband's murder. (Thermuthis cried the way 1 of my relatives in Alabama described as "crying proper"—I.R.) (212)

Thematically, perhaps more important models for Reed are Negro militants like Rap Brown and Jennifer Lawson, whose brand of humor "lays bare the artificiality of the adherence to the Judeo-Christian ethics in America"¹⁶—the central theme of Reed's fiction. The following example from one of Lawson's comic routines parallels Reed's theme and comic rhythm in *Mumbo Jumbo*:

Yeah, Christianize me and colonize me.
Make me your slave and bring me your Jesus . . .
The constitution said I was three-fifths of a person.¹⁷

In Reed's novel, as in the work of these comedians, humor is an integral part of the critique of society and fiction implicit in the "dialogic"¹⁸ nature of parody:

Parodic-travesty literature [writes Bakhtin] introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly too contradictory and heteroglot to be fit into a high and straightforward genre.¹⁹

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, this critique of fiction and reality through humor is systematically dialectical (as is to be expected in a parody of a genre whose basic structure is dialectical) and thematically consistent. Humor, both technically and thematically, stems from the basic contention behind the plot of detection—the critique of the disconnection of Western culture from nature (itself an irrational force) and its insistence on rationality as its foremost principle.

This critique extends to the concept of time in the novel:

Time is a pendulum [LaBas explains]. Not a river.
More akin to what goes around comes around
(249);

a view which moves the work away from the linear concept of time detective fiction shares with the Christian concept of history. Both the plotting of the typical detective novel and the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic view of history “presuppose and require that an end will bestow upon the whole duration and meaning.”²⁰ The end of *Mumbo Jumbo* both negates the final restoring of order and justice of detective fiction and reaffirms the aesthetic break away from the Western aesthetic code. The pyrrhic victory of PaPa LaBas and Black Herman—pyrrhic because they unveil the conspiracy but fail to save the epidemic and its text—is met with hope for the rebirth of Jes Grew in a more receptive aesthetic environment; an environment which is being created by texts like *Mumbo Jumbo* which embody the creating and liberating aesthetics of Neo-Hoodooism.

Mumbo Jumbo thus becomes one of Reed's most important contributions to the reinterpretation of Afro-American experience and culture evident in current historiography and sociology. Among Black American writers, this reinterpretation has often taken the form of parodies of detective fiction. Richard Wright's *The Outsider* is an early parodic adaptation of the hard-boiled detective story; Sam Greenlee's spy story, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, Clarence Major's “anti-detective” novel *Reflex and Bone Structure* and Reed's *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* and *Mumbo Jumbo* belong to this new tradition.

The parody of detective fiction has allowed these writers to move away from the logocentrism of Western models that has characterized interpretations of Afro-American culture and

literature and towards an affirmation of that experience in texts that are not submissive to Western models. The “carnivalization” of these models (to use the term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin)²¹ has allowed these writers “to concentrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from that prevailing point of view of the world, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted.”²² As *Mumbo Jumbo* shows, the transformation of literary texts through parody leads to alternative structures which allow writers to supersede and reorient older traditions.



Notes

- 1 A. E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Story* (London: n.p., 1958) 11.
- 2 Robin Winks, Introduction, in *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood: Prentice Hall, 1980) 7.
- 3 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," in *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977) 43.
- 4 Reed's *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, also a parody of detective fiction, uses the whodunit as a model.
- 5 George Grella, "Murder and the Mean Streets: The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel," in *Detective Fiction: Crime and Compromise*, eds. Dick Allen and David Chacko (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 104.
- 6 Grella 104.
- 7 Structurally, unlike the whodunit (which contains two stories—that of the crime and that of the investigation "which appears as the place where all devices are justified and 'naturalized'") in the thriller "we are no longer told about a crime anterior to the moment of the narrative; the narrative coincides with the action. No thriller is presented in the form of memoirs; there is no point reached where the narrator comprehends all past events, we do not know if he will reach the end of the story alive. Prospection takes the place of retrospection." Todorov 46-47.
- 8 Ishamel Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Avon Books, 1972) 217-218. All subsequent page references to this source will appear in parentheses in the text.
- 9 Robert Grover, "An Interview with Ishamel Reed," *Black American Literature Forum* 12 (1978): 15.
- 10 Chester F. Fontenot, "Ishamel Reed and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Black American Literature Forum* 12 (1978): 22.
- 11 The concern with historical and pseudo-historical documentation is also found in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*—a work which shows significant similarities to *Mumbo Jumbo*. Structurally, both works parody the detective novel in general and the thriller in particular: Reed by blending into a Western narrative formula based on rationality a non-Western (some would say anti-western) aesthetic code based on Afro-American myth and ritual; Pynchon by having Stencil, his detective, obscure the boundaries between historical fact and fiction by inventing his own plots. Thematically, Reed's attacks on Western culture's unwillingness to accept or value other patterns of thought is echoed in Pynchon's view of Western culture as one moving towards stasis precisely because of its inability to accept other cultural views. In Reed, the examples reveal the West's plot against non-Western thought and cultures; in Pynchon they reveal the apocalyptic force in Western culture which leads to entropy.
- 12 In a brief discussion of *Mumbo Jumbo* (in "Culture Clash, Survival and Transformation: A Study of Some Innovative Afro-American Novels of Detection," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 38.1 [1985]), Joe Weixlmann links PaPa LaBas to the "Voodoo 'loa' (deity) Eshu, in Haiti called PaPa Legba, a pan-African trickster figure, and Eh La-Bas, a phrase used in New Orleans jazz recordings of the Twenties and Thirties" (25).
- 13 Ishmael Reed, "Neo-Hoodoo Manifesto," in *Conjure* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1972) 24.
- 14 Reed comments of PaPa LaBas' pact with nature: "Freud would read this as 'a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole,' which poor Freud 'never experienced,' being an Atonist, the part of Jealous Art which shut out of itself all traces of animism. When Freud came to New York in 1909 LaBas sought him out to teach him The Work; but he couldn't gain entrance to the hotel suite. . . . He could have taught Freud The Work. Give him a nook of the Nulu Kulu and maybe his followers would not have termed those sentiments 'abnormal' or 'pathological.' For next to Black Herman he was 1 of the few in the Northeast who could summon a loa when he wished" (50-51).

- 15 The critique of Afro-American literature's concern with social-realism and tragedy is an important theme in Reed's fiction. In *Yellow Black Radio Broke Down* social realism is satirized in the parody of the attack on the Lone Ranger by the Cavendish gang. Loop Garoo, an "individualist given to fantasy and . . . off in matters of detail," is "put through changes" by Bo Shmo and the Neo-Realist Gang, for whom "all art must be for the end of liberating the masses." ("Being neo-social realist and not very original—writes Reed—they gave him a version of Arab Death.") In *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, Chorus, a character obsessed with having been "crowded out of his lines" by Antigone, thwarts Minnie's hijacking of a plane. He was provoked by the fact that Minnie had not found his last performance "relevant." Reed describes Chorus as a "fugitive slave who wanted his aesthetic Canada."
- 16 Nancy Levi-Arnea and Clara B. Anthony, "Contemporary Negro Humor as Social Satire," *Phylon* 29 (1968): 45.
- 17 Levi-Arnea and Anthony 46.
- 18 The distinctive literary role of parody is that of offering a *Dialogue* between two texts. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains "in parody, two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects. It is true that only one of these languages (the one being parodied) is present in its own right; the other is present invisibly, as an actualizing background for creating and perceiving." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) 79.
- 19 Bakhtin 55.
- 20 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966) 46.
- 21 Bakhtin introduces the concept of carnivalization in *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), where he examines Rabelais' works as parodies of the festive forms of carnival. Carnival "celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of a new world" . . . "the old world that has been destroyed is offered together with the new world and is represented with it as a dying part of dual body" 220 and 410).
- 22 Bakhtin 34.