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"Kungry, Hungry"

Hunger is a prevailing theme in Black Boy: physical hunger, hunger for knowledge, hunger for the genuine feeling of freedom.

7

"Each event spoke with a cryptic tongue."

Fire and violence are part of Wright's origin story. This origin story mirrors that found in slave narratives, from Frederick Douglass's to Harriett Jacobs.

37

(text in parenthesis)

These two parenthetical asides illuminate how Black Boy documents the injustices and brutalities of being black in the North and South. The Inner narrative dramatizes how Wright transcends the imposed social structures of the North and the South.

102

Wright's conflicts with religion begin here and with his grandmother. Religion becomes another theme running through the narrative of Black Boy. Hunger and religion are dueling themes.

167

Here we begin to see how Richard Wright's creative desires begin to come into conflict with the strictures of his religious upbringing.

169

Hunger. Humiliation. Hurt. At this point in Wright's life and in the overall narrative, these feelings begin to run together. Wright sees humiliation in his constant hunger and hurt from the shame of that hunger.

183

Here we see how Wright cannot learn the rules of living under Jim Crow. His sense of personal ethics and dignity do not allow him to view himself as inferior. What begins to happen here is a shift in the narrative to exploring the ethics- and ethical conflicts-of living under Jim Crow.

194

"I was a non-man..."

Living under Jim Crow is beginning to drain Wright spiritually and emotionally, and religion provides no solace. This book is a means of bearing witness, of Wright saying that the Black experience is more than what has happened to us.

196

"The words and actions..."

As noted earlier, Black Boy is about the ethical conflicts of living under Jim Crow. Here we begin to see how Wright's ethical conflicts compete with the external forces and realities of Jim Crow.

198

"Several Negro girls..."

This paragraph illustrates an important point from cultural critic bell hooks: misogyny and sexism are part of the architecture of racism.

208-209

Wright's arrival in Memphis marks the beginning of his escape from Jim Crow. Memphis was often the first stop for Black Mississippians during the great migration. While still segregated, it offered greater social and educational possibilities.

231

Here Wright's hunger begins to compete with his internal fears. Hunger is fear, and fear is hunger.

245

Wright's physical hunger comes to be transformed into a hunger for knowledge, extending the metaphor of hunger in the text. His desire to read H.L. Mencken reflects that hunger.

246

In H. L. Mencken's essay "The Sahara of the Bozart" he charged that the South was "almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert." This would have been both a revelation and a reassurance to Richard Wright.

253

(concluding paragraph)

Reading both transforms Wright's perspective and creates an emotional distance from the world in which he lives. Here he must begin to either come to terms with the forces of Jim Crow or find a means of escape.

257

Intellectually Wright has improved his ability to interpret his place in the world. With that enhanced intellectual perspective, he feels the only option available is to leave.

The narrative now shifts to explore his intellectual hunger.

261

Both the epigraph and the opening paragraph mark a narrative shift. Wright's desire to quench his hunger comes to be tied to survival and a struggle for dignity. Like the song in the epigraphy, Wright "wonders if other people..[wonder]just like I do."

266

The parenthetical material on the next two pages provide a window into Wright's interior thoughts and life at this point in his life. Wright's personality and ambitions are at war with each other, and he is beginning to expand his consciousness of how to be a black man who maintains a sense of dignity.

278

Dostoevski's *The Possessed* is an allegory of political and moral conflicts in 1860s Russia. This serves as a foreshadowing of Wright's involvement with the American Communist Party.

294

The Great Depression makes it harder for Wright to survive as an insurance agent. Here we begin to see how elements of the religion he knew in the South come to be linked to emotionally drawing black men like Wright to the Communist party.

296

The Bonus Army marchers were World War I veterans who gathered in Washington in the summer of 1932 to demand cash-payment redemption of their service certificates (or bonuses for wartime service).

302

(parenthetical text)

This part of *Black Boy* was restored to the book in 1991. Originally titled "American Hunger" For commercial reasons, his publishers published only the Mississippi experience as part of the book. Wright's text here reveals racism in the North.

323

Wright becomes a club leader in the Communist party, although he never officially becomes a member. Here Wright begins to use the publications of the party as a means of getting his work published, while also dealing with internal conflicts within the party.

329

Wright is part of the John Reed Club, which is named for journalist John Reed whose "Seven Days That Shook the World" told the story of Russia's Bolshevik Revolution.

341

What the reader begins to see in this part of *Black Boy* is Richard Wright's formation as a writer. His philosophical conflicts with the Communist Party, as well as his work with them, provided a means for him to grow as a writer, giving him the opportunity to publish.

344

"It was inconceivable to me though bred in the lap of southern hate, that a man could not have his say." Part of Wright's conflict with the Communist Party philosophically had more to do with his experience in the South. He felt he would have more freedom in the North, yet found constraints on that freedom in a place where he expected not to.

369

American Intellectuals were drawn to the idealism of Communism, particularly its emphasis on racial equity. But Wright discovers that idealism was difficult to put into practice. And as a self educated person--one who questioned the orthodoxy of religion--questioning rather than accepting had become a part of his adult philosophy.

378

When Wright joins the Federal Writers' Project, his communist past follows him. Although it is not mentioned here, Wright met another Mississippian while working for the FWP: Margaret Walker. For more information on how they met and their relationship, read Margaret Walker's Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius.

384

Black Boy ends evoking the theme that it evokes from the very first page: hunger. For Wright, his hunger is what kept him alive and shaped the person he became. Hunger may defeat people, but Wright found strength in his desire to feed his hunger, whether it was physical, spiritual, or intellectual.

48

This exchange with Wright's mother on racial identity seems archaic to our modern perspective. Bear in mind that each of Wright's grandfathers had been slaves, one fighting for the U.S. Colored troops. Slavery in many ways was still a marker of shame. As Wright says on p. 49 "She was not concealing facts, but feelings, attitudes, convictions she did not want me to know."