

The Deforming Mirror of Truth: A Reading of Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*

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Abstract- *Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo calls for a national history that incorporates black experience and culture. Focusing on the form of the content as well as the content of the form, the present paper discusses the process of constructing another history, which subverts the icons of Western hegemony: social codes, reality, conventions, etc., in order for a hybrid culture to prevail. In other words, it elaborates on the way Mumbo Jumbo juxtaposes both cultural histories, integrating indeterminacy with the effect of de-totalizing the meta-narrative of the Western culture.*

Keywords- *deconstruction; history; the other history; fragmentation; indeterminacy; humour; hybridity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Our times seem to call for new myths and a revised master narrative that better inspire and reflect upon our true condition. Such a new narrative would find inspiration, for instance, in an oppressed people who defied social death as slaves and freedmen, insisting on their humanity and creating a culture despite a social consensus that they were a “brutish sort of people.” Such a new narrative would bring slavery and the persistent oppression of race from the margins to the center, to define the limits and boundaries of the American Dream. Such a new narrative would oblige us to face the deforming mirror of truth. (Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 1990, lvi-lvii)

The abovementioned passage underlines the central point and the main perspective this paper focuses on: the deforming mirror of truth. “Writing is fighting,” Ishmael Reed admits in his collection of essays of the same title, issued in 1990. This metaphor reveals the particular condition and the committed role of the African American writer, as it is well illustrated in *Mumbo Jumbo*, which was published eighteen years before Huggins wrote *Black Odyssey*.

Indeed, *Mumbo Jumbo* exhibits a mirror, a deforming mirror of truth by appropriating and revising some myths of the Western culture. Labelled as a postmodern text, it breaks the preconceived rules of a novel, defies and destabilizes standard conventions of writing, and above all, calls into question “notions of closure, totalization, and universality,” to borrow Linda Hutcheon's words, that are part of the Western grand narratives. (2004, 67)

The reading of such an unconventional novel requires being active and fighting between a multiple layers of texts, dichotomies, and intersectional borders, that generally leave the reader unsettled, confused. The story, the language, the writing forms and techniques, etc., are constructed upon a set of contradictions and ruptures, which are not dialectically resolved, but coexist. The result

of all this is an undecidable or indeterminate discourse that causes discomfort, confusion, and uncertainty. By thematizing indeterminacy and instability, *Mumbo Jumbo* “deflowers,” to borrow Linda Hutcheon's concept, cultural history and its representation. (2004, 46) In other words, *Mumbo Jumbo* challenges the dominant history with an alternative history or an altered version of history; that is, another history that incorporates African American experience, which brings to life a people who had been both culturally and historically dead.

That other history concentrates on the space between/on, according to Michelle Webb, “the cultural boundary between African—or other non-Western cultures—and Euro-American ‘civilization.’” (66) It is a liminal space that brings forth the merit of illuminating the holes, silences, or distortions – weaknesses and inconsistencies– that crack the mirror of the dominant history. The total result is a deforming mirror of the Western culture and Truth, a non-hierarchical cultural history firmly characterized by hybridity.

Focusing on deconstruction as the central organizing principle of Reed's novel, the basic question of this research is: In making blacks' experience conspicuous in the national history, how does *Mumbo Jumbo* bridge the binary opposites in order to refigure or merge national and racial identity into a single myth? In other words, how does Reed crack the deforming mirror of white dominant history? Within this deconstructive perspective, this paper begins by articulating the oppositions between the “norm” and the “other”; then proceeds by focusing on hybridity: the intersection or borderline between the opposite sides.

2. COUNTERVAILING IDEOLOGY: BETWEEN THE “NORM” AND THE “OTHER”

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed overthrows the hierarchy between the “norm” and the “Other” or the marginal. This deconstructive perspective is signaled in the title of the

novel. “Mumbo Jumbo: (‘ma-ma-gyo-mbo’) a magician who makes the troubled spirits of ancestors go away.” (7) Mumbo Jumbo signifies to dissipate, to dissolve, settle or fix something. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed signifies on white and black culture through exposition and negation. As Jonathan Culler (2007) writes, “To deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.” (86)

Reed’s deconstructive process brings in contradiction African culture or tradition and the ideology of white supremacy, and as Hogue (2002) has pointed out, “Deconstructing the novel becomes a metaphor for deconstructing Western metaphysics.” (183) It is a process of demystification of the Western order, the dissolution or disintegration of the values and truths of Western culture. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, as Lizabeth Paravisini (1986) well summarizes, “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.) (118)

Thematically as well as structurally, *Mumbo Jumbo* operates a rupture between the centre and Western scientific belief. This Atonist order, which glorifies Western culture, is ‘the most notable achievements of mankind’ (57). At the periphery, however, stands Afro-American culture, which is said to be ‘primitive,’ at best ‘charming’ and ‘mostly propagandistic.’ (57) In his dismantling of these ideological binaries, Reed uses diverse deconstructive strategies, a series of disruptive rhetorical tropes that match perfectly with one of Slavoj Zizek’s definitional approach to postmodernism. Indeed, for Zizek (1997), postmodernism can be defined as:

“the deconstruction of the claim to universality of reason, the endeavor to prove that this claim to universality is necessarily, constitutively “false,” that it masks a particular network of power relations; that universal reason is as such, in its very form, ‘repressive’ and ‘totalitarian’; that its truth claim is nothing but an effect of a series of rhetorical figures.” (141)

To begin with, *Mumbo Jumbo* is dramatized in a form of a detective story centred on the investigation of a murder and a quest for a text, the Text of Jes Grew. Reed uses the Text of Jes Grew as a discursive process to introduce the world of mystery or African mythology into the sterile order of the Atonist Path or Western culture. The Text of Jes Grew is a serious threat for science, European empiricism – Western hegemony – represented in the novel as the Atonist Path. “That text... that discredited order which once held the fate of Western Civilization in its hands until the scandal.” (64) The Atonists’ reaction is to appropriate the root of Jes Grew in order “To knock it dock it co-opt it swing it or bop it. If Jes Grew slips into the radiolas and Dictaphones all is lost.” (64)

Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* therefore concentrates on the absent Text, the book of Thoth (the written word), instead of Jes Grew, (the spoken word). This displacement of importance from speech to the written text is part of Reed’s deconstructive strategy of Western culture. In Western tradition, speech is central and natural and writing is marginal and unnatural. It is what Derrida terms logocentrism. Logos means word, truth, and reason; and to be logocentric means to believe that TRUTH is the voice, the word, the expression of a central and absolute cause or origin. (Jim Powell, 1997, 33) In the binary opposition between speaking and writing, speech is central and writing is marginal, according to European logocentrism. Writing is said to be artificial, degenerative, and pathological.

As Zizek (1997) postulates, “Deconstruction demonstrates the way the self-presence of the voice is always already split/deferred by the trace of writing.” (125) accordingly, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, the absent Text of Jes Grew is called in the centre. This absence makes the main Text, the universal Text or Western culture incomplete, marginal instead of being at the centre. In order for it to be complete, it needs to master or dominate all other Texts including the one of Jes Grew. In making the Text of Jes Grew absent, putting the absent or missing Text at the centre of the novel, Reed is making what is absent (the Text) more important than what is present (the spoken Word): a de-centring of logocentrism.

Still focusing on the detection process to fight against the norm, Reed, from the periphery, exhumes an African cultural myth. Thus, PaPa LaBas, the central character of the novel, plays the role of the detective. He is a “trickster figure,” a master of signifyin(g). In African American rhetoric tradition, the trickster is, according to Gates,

“Someone who, by using the tools of the system in a new way, combats the system. It is a way to overcome the system from within, because the trickster is using the master’s tools, master’s own language, but the master cannot understand him, because he takes everything what the trickster says literally. But the trickster means it figuratively.” (40)

The trickster figure, together with the VooDoo aesthetics, is used by Reed to articulate some rhetorical operations of transgression of the Western codes and conventions. Thus, beyond the ideology of the hegemony, the conception of time in its broader frame of chronological order is contradicted in *Mumbo Jumbo*. As Li Ma (2013) postulates, “Postmodern fictionists oppose to logic, coherence, and closeness in plot arrangement and they believe that close structure that has coherent meaning, characters’ logical movements and integrated plot is merely writers’ own wishful thinking, instead of something based on real life.” (1341) The time Reeds exhibits is not linear, not chronological and it has no closure. Time actually moves forward and backwards. Since the Western understanding of time is dismantled, what is favoured is a time that is repeated, with the aim of

recreation. As a consequence, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a composite narrative, made of subtexts, pretexts and post-texts.

Against the convention of linearity and the orthodox of detection fiction, PaPa LaBas embodies temporal distortion. He is an alternative detective who does not follow the traditional logic of an investigation that is grounded into the cause-effect-solution order. The temporal framework of *Mumbo Jumbo* focuses on temporal distortion, which subverts the closure and causality of the narrative. Indeed, Reed gives voice to improvisation which is a central mode of expression of Voodoo culture: "Is this the end of Jes Grew? Jes Grew has no end and no beginning. It even precedes that little ball that exploded 1000000000s of years ago and led to what we are now." (204). As Swope (2002) puts it, *Mumbo Jumbo* is "an obvious transgression of the Western detective genre." (612) Based on the model of the Egyptian myth, a non-Western narrative, it gives voice to other little stories and the other truths, which fragments and disarms the power of European meta-narrative.

This rhetorical operation of transgression of the Western order appears in the beginning of the narrative. Unlike the basic pattern of a narrative structure, *Mumbo Jumbo* starts like the snapshot of a detective film. It presents first the manifestations of Jes Grew on some individuals before announcing Jes Grew as the culprit. Moreover, Jes Grew is a psychic epidemic which evolves with improvisation, without planning or a definite or final version. As his name goes, Jes Grew, as "just grown," indicates something that has grown instantly, spontaneously and that presents into a new or different form or expression. It is always growing into a new form, suggesting fluidity, incompleteness, and indeterminacy, a source of confusion and instability. Its text is scattered between fourteen people:

"It's in the hands of 14 J. G. C. individuals scattered throughout Harlem for now. Only I can call it in and anthologize it. Janitors, Pullman porters, shoeshine boys, dropouts from Harvard, musicians, jazz musicians. Its carbons are in New York, Kansas City, Oakland, California, Chattanooga Tennessee, Detroit, Mobile, Raleigh. It's dispersed. Untogether. I sent it out as a chain book." (69)

What is at stake in that passage is that Jes Grew cannot be controlled or restricted. It defies all boundaries, challenges confinement. This dissemination of the Text of Jes Grew indicates the idea of dispersal, disunity, or multiplicity which is opposed to unity. Decentralization or the lack of centralization is a countervailing ideology of the Atonists: "They are calling it a plague when in fact it is an anti-plague... Then it will be a pandemic and you will really see something. And then they will be finished." (25)

Jes Grew, the embodiment of the disruption of unity, is also a metaphor of dismissal of European empiricism, another counter-discursive strategy. As a matter of fact, the Western order values thinking and rejects feeling as an epistemological approach to knowledge. For Reed, this

Western metaphysics is not an autonomous form of knowing. Through PaPa LaBas, he posits that empirical order or evidence is not the only valid channel for knowledge. Dreams, feelings and intuition – "knockings" – are quite reliable to decipher, understand and explicate phenomenon.

Atonism is the one way wherein the sole authority derives from Western hegemony, with science and rationality at its core. It believes in progress, mastery and desire for centre. Unlike this rigidity of the Atonist Path, PaPa LaBas, "carries Jes Grew in him like most other folk carry genes," (23). He is not only attached to human nature and intuition, but he also privileges chance and the natural instincts in order to acquire knowledge. Above all, he rejects Western culture's concern with rationality. On that standpoint, he criticizes Freudian psychology for its rejection of the human irrational manifestations in favour of rationality: "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." (45)

Eventually, humour appears in *Mumbo Jumbo* as one of the total effect of the subversive tools used by Reed to create a counter-discourse to white hegemony. More than a simple effect, Reed uses it purposely to call Western order into question. Under Reed's pen, humour is, on the one hand, a weapon that challenges the existing power structure or the cultural taboo, and, on the other hand, it rejects the idea of an objective reality or truth. This multiple process occurs within the warring forces of signification throughout the text of *Mumbo Jumbo*. This deconstructive rhetoric and subversive power of humour, quite dominant throughout the whole novel, is a medium of resistance. It operates to de-totalize white narrative of superiority. An example is the language play in the following statement attributed to James Weldon Johnson, when he was asked to comment on the news of a white marine being cannibalized in Haiti. Reed precedes Weldon Johnson's answer with a definition of the term: ("cannibalism: the action is termed barbarous, ghastly, heinous, an affront to the entire 'civilized' world")

"The question as to which is more reprehensible, the alleged custom in Haiti of eating a human being without cooking him or the authenticated custom in the United States of cooking a human being without eating him. The Haitian custom would have at least, a utilitarian purpose in extenuation." (60)

As Zara Zimbardo (2014) writes, "Humorous strategies are powerful in the capacity to "unfix" dominant meanings through subversive satire and parody, and affix new meanings that destabilize the underlying assumptions of the stereotype." (62) Humour appears in the text's tensions and contradictions; in the critical signification: the repetition and inversion. To be funny indicates a lack of seriousness. And Reed disparages seriousness, rigidity of

cultural norms, of cultural hierarchy, chipping away essentialism.

Mumbo Jumbo operates on the notions of disruption, transgression, and fragmentation. It challenges Western assumptions and conventions of knowledge and truth. Setting himself against those conventions or the notions of absolute truth, Reed invents his own version of textuality to undermine the traditional conceptions. According to Michelle Webb, he “plays on conventional Western ideologies, using common tropes and concepts to tell his own account of history.” (45) It is a history that cannot be confined within the limits of Western empiricism. Against a metanarrative that privileges one truth, one totalizing concept of truth, Reed gives voice to some imbricated, puzzle like mini-narratives. To de-centre the play of the system of Western domination, Reed challenges the totalizing impulse of the centre and calls for cultural hybridity.

3. FORGING HYBRIDITY: THE INTERSECTION OF THE BORDER LINES

Mumbo Jumbo pushes on boundaries and “never offers a solution in the traditional sense.” (Swope, 2002, 612) In *Mumbo Jumbo*, convention and reality break down and new reality or perspective emerges out of them. Indeed, Reed concentrates on the borderlines between the hegemonic and the marginal cultures, the “space in-between, the cultural boundary between non-Western cultures and Euro-American civilization,” (613) and the result is a crossroads or cultural hybridity. As Laurie Grobman (2007) writes, “Hybridity refers to a cultural mixing resulting in something new.” (21)

Mumbo Jumbo is constructed on a hybrid aesthetic that does not privilege one particular form over another, but “glories in the interplay.” (Grobman, 2007, 69) The different binarisms are reconfigured, dismantled in favour of a “unity-in-difference.” A theory of hybridity, Grobman (2007) maintains, “opens up the spaces between and among textual and extratextual borders to enable the dismantling of binary oppositions and the emergence of more complex and multiple knowledges.” (35)

Thus, a primary form of hybridity worthy of notice in *Mumbo Jumbo* is the aesthetic crossing which is experimented in the genre of the book. This hybrid form illuminates the relational, fluid intermingling of literary genres: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, film, documentary, textbook, etc. *Mumbo Jumbo* is the conflation of various genres. The form of the novel does not easily lend itself to the traditional conventions of the genre categorization. Rather, it reflects this cultural amalgamation by combining a variety of literary styles and forms.

Within what is supposed to be a novel, there are elements of drama: some stage directions, as on page 43-44: “[*The curtain opens, revealing Charlotte's Pick, who is about 4'1"...*She reads. *Pick disappears!*] The curtains close

upon thunderous applause and laughter. Besides, Reed integrates graphics, pictures, photographs, paintings or drawings, dictionary definitions, a partial bibliography, etc. Furthermore, there is an absence of quotation marks to indicate the dialogues between the characters, and Reed uses Arabic numerals instead of following the conventions of spelling out certain numbers (for example, the number 1, which often gets misread as the word I, causing the reader to revisit many sentences) all this suggests that there is no dividing line between the text of history and literature, between reality and books, facts and fiction, reason and intuition. The lines between history and myth, fiction and reality are ruptured, bridged, regenerated, and at the intersection of stories, and against the artifice of conventions and all prescribed authoritative norms and forms, Reed makes stories out of chronicles, constructs plots out of sequences.

Another level of hybridization *Mumbo Jumbo* fosters is people's identity. The cultural mixing is manifest in the characters' ambiguous identity. “Characters in postmodern novels do not actually exist, but appear as ideas, so they are unknowable to readers.” (Li Ma, 2013, 1341) In Reed's novel, the characters are vague figures or even images, which excel in indeterminacy and uncertainty. An example is PaPa LaBas, the main character, of whom Henry Louis Gates (1988) writes that he is,

a conflation of two of the several names of Esu, our Pan-African trickster. Called Papa Legba as his Haitian honorific and invoked through the phrase “eh là-bas” in New Orleans jazz recordings of the 1920s and 1930s, Pa Pa La Bas is the Afro-American trickster figure from black sacred tradition. His surname, of course, is French for “down” or “over there,” and his presence unites “over there” (Africa) with “right here.” (223)

PaPa LaBas is a medium character who always stands between two, playing the intermediary role. He mediates and works to maintain the balance between the other characters (the humans) and the loa. The perceptual explanation of the world is contradicted with the mythological heritage. Michelle Webb writes that: “he bridges the ideas between mystery and science as he signifies and essentially recreates a commonly understood version of history.” (33) He is between western logic and empiricism and the African way of resolving mystery. In other words, he thinks within western thought as well as outside western thought. For his investigation, he uses his two heads (25), combining two modes of thinking, two ideologies: “his knockings,” and western empirical method, to resolve matters. Which one is better is not mentioned. None is inverted or placed over the other. To the Western mode of thinking, he superposes the African mode, in order to criticize the single mindedness of the western. Here, Reed focuses and maintains the borderline; he does not reject Western science or cultural logic, nor does he look down upon the African culture and tradition,

which he sometimes mixes with other culture during ritual performances at the Mumbo Jumbo cathedral:

"PaPa LaBas opens his hollow obeah stick and gives the drums a drink of bootlegged whiskey. Stunned by Berbelang's attack upon him as an 'anachronism,' he has introduced some Yoga techniques. In 1 main room, people are doing the Cobra the Fish the Lion the Lotus the Tree the Voyeurs Pose the Adepts Pose the Wheel Pose the Grows Pose and many others." (50)

The rituals of song, dance, and spirit possession contribute to the rebuilding of an alternative self. They serve as a source of spiritual strength, reinforcing conceptions of self-worth within an alternative narrative.

Against the hegemonic Western truth that devalues African Americans, Reed values the notion of hybridity, of something being produced as a result of merging binaries. He undermines notions of categorization, and as Swope (2002) states,

"What Reed's novel attacks is not so much scientific logic as Atonism; that is, single-mindedness or the cultural restraints that allow for only one way of thinking or proceeding. Mumbo Jumbo does not disparage all science but rather a particular, narrow-minded devotion to 'imperial sciences'." (619)

Mumbo Jumbo suggests the perspective of hybridity by revealing that Christianity and Voodoo have the same background: "The Voodoo tradition instructs that Moses learned the secrets of Voodoo from Jethro and taught them to his followers." (186) Moreover, Voodooism, through Jes Grew, its manifestation, emerges as a symbol of hybridity: it is pantheistic, adaptable to new ideas, new truths, as Papa LaBas comments:

"Where does that leave the ancient Vodun aesthetic: pantheistic, becoming, I which bountifully permits 1000s of spirits, as many as the imagination can hold. Infinite Spirits and Gods. So many that it would take a book of the Dead and all of the holy books in the world to list, and still room would have to be made for more." (35)

Voodoo defies all boundaries and cannot be controlled or restricted: "There are no isolated cases in this thing. It knows no class no race no consciousness. It is self-propagating and you can never tell when it will hit." (5) Jes Grew, which appears both as a plague and an anti-plague (33), is a metaphor of fluidity.

Hybridity is notable in the identity and attitudes of other characters in the novel. When Nathan Brown, the man who wrote *Dark Crepuscule* is invited by Hinckle Von Vampton to join the staff of a journal, because, as Hinckle says, "...the way you recorded that Simon the servant, the servant who carried our Lord's Cross, was colored," (117) Nathan justifies his position, asserting his hybrid educational background: "I have been educated in both cultures and so I use the advantages of both." (117)

Ambiguity, vagueness, uncertainty, and indeterminacy are other traits of the characters in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Generally, they take no clear-cut position, and they therefore blur categorization or classification. Abdul Karim, a black character, who is supposed to possess the book of Thoh, the Text of Jes Grew, is said to receive "money from the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan." (51) It goes the same with Hinckle Von Vampton whose racial identity cannot sometimes be specified by the reader. Is he white or black, or a raceless individual? Differences between blacks and whites are undecidable, which lays the ground for the notion of hybridity.

Hybridity in *Mumbo Jumbo* also holds from facts and fiction, myth and history are mixed or merged. The frontier between traditional Western history and non-western myth is ruptured. The exposition of history and mythical history functions on a non hierarchical basis, hence the indeterminacy. PaPa LaBas uses both to conduct his investigation on Von Vampton. Instead of providing fact and evidence to prove that Von Vampton and Gould are criminals, Papa LaBas conflates history, recalling and blending Egyptian mythology and Judeo Christian history to solve crimes. "LaBas does not alter the 'history' to which Westerners are accustomed; he simply adds to that history and fills in the gaps that have been left out with the 'myth' of his story. The message here is that the truth LaBas tries to locate lies somewhere between myth and history." (Webb, 40) Reed juxtaposes fact and fiction, without any hierarchical position. Through that integrated approach, Reed is showing that history is a human construct and the truth maybe can never be found, or it can be found but at the crossroads of myth and history.

In this perspective, rigid binary opposition between Atonism and Voodooism is undermined in the novel. Reed also problematizes the white/black binary by showing how blacks and whites can be both Atonists and followers of Jes Grew. Hybridity is used to mediate the conflicts between Western culture and African culture. "Reed subverts this white/black binary opposition by insisting upon a "both/and" oscillating movement." (Hogue, 2002, 188) By the end of *Mumbo Jumbo*, neither black nor white is racially privileged. Reed's characters bear fluid, dynamic identities across the race. Ultimately, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a hybrid text. Like identities, hybrid texts are, according to Grobman (2007), "fluid and dynamic, always changing, and always influenced by various overlapping and even conflicting tropes, modes, discourses, genres, forms, voices, languages, styles, and so forth." (35)

As *Mumbo Jumbo* shows, truth is elusive. It is a matter of relative perspective rather than absolute order. There is no singular truth, and there is no unique way of accessing truth. Rather, for truth to be valid or appropriate, multiple approaches or perspectives are required; and above all, there is no absolute or total Truth. The truth can be imagined as the meeting point of opposites. Whenever there is a history, there is another history. In such a context, the floor or voice should be given to the other parties or stories to present their perspectives. It is Reed's

focal point in *Mumbo Jumbo*, according to Michaela Kravalová (2012) who asserts that Ishmael Reed shows that, “any voice can be totalizing and the process of presenting the other point of view and contradicting it with another one is never-ending,” (57) for there is no universal world view, no centre, only differing viewpoints and perspectives.

4. CONCLUSION

The historical imagination by Ishmael Reed contradicts or challenges the white dominant history. He brings the African American history into the centre, a history which has been fanned by western culture. Thus, outside the confines of Eurocentric hegemony, a new history emerges that secures pride in the African race and culture. Reed disrupts the discursive process of stigmatization, which supposes a negation of identity. Negation is countered by affirmation. Against this realm of discourse, *Mumbo Jumbo* juxtaposes another discourse, a counter discourse in which Reed makes fun of whites as well as blacks. Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* resists to any deterministic approach, and the ghost of indeterminacy haunts the whole book from the beginning to its end. Going from the fact that the older master narrative no longer serves as universal authority, it puts into question standard grounds, conventions and assumptions, history, and truth that are taken for granted. Focusing on the boundaries between history and the other history, it articulates and undermines the dominant history and reshapes another history. He gives voice to the other history, or the other truth that has been excluded from the metanarrative. *Mumbo Jumbo* functions then as the other history, and more specifically, to use Nathan Irvin Huggins's phrase, it works as “the deforming mirror of truth.” In that perspective, “Reed manages to undermine even the most essentialized constructions of racial boundaries and offers coexisting systems that include differences.” (Hogue, 188)

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