

Portrayal of Habituation in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*

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Abstract: This research investigates the preferences of Habituation in the major and the minor characters of the fiction *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Scott Reed. The characters who prefer to change their mindset, overcome the struggle in the limited time period. This research also examines the characters who could not adapt to the surrounding in which they exist; such character generally gets in to a doomed fate. The author stresses on the impact of the characters in his fiction, through their mindset to prioritize their needs, based on that they decide to habituate certain happenings in their surroundings. It will help each individual to change even the most negative vibration around them in to an optimistic one. The Psychic plague or the disorder which is discussed in this fiction, formulates both positive and negative paradigm on its host. The author has introduced a unique style by inventing and spreading this typical disease in his work. New Orleans, Harlem and Haiti are the places which plays the major role throughout the fiction. On the whole the author portrays the culture of Africa, through this epidemic, in the American land, which itself proves the title of this article Habituation.

Keywords: Epidemic, Jes Grew, Plague, Talking android, Habituation, Pacification, Loa.

Adaptation becomes influential in the contemporary world, it is in fact an art which we acquire and pursue with gratification from our ancestors. We abide to change our mind set in a certain period of time to achieve things, the African decent people who came to United States tried their best to habituate the culture and the lifestyle which is followed by the western class. When doing that they faced many discrepancies, it took enormous time for them to ever come it. Writers present the concept of habituation in their work through their reading or through the legends to which they listened to or it might be through their own experience. "Biology teaches us that organisms adapt—or don't; sociology claims that people adapt—or don't. We know that ideas can adapt; sometimes even institutions can adapt." (Hutcheon N P.NO)

Contemporary African American writers bring in the concept of their writing not only through the readings but also through what they listen, Habituation plays a major role among the major and minor characters of the fiction *Mumbo Jumbo*, the author has introduced the interesting Jes Grew plague in the very first chapter. This plague which is considered to be a psychic epidemic spreads rapidly in America.

When a particular patient has been inquired about his feel when he is in to it, he has given an explanation that he could see a snake which is entwined in its face, he felt like he is in the heart of Africa; he further explained that he could listen to various musical instruments. This is the feel of an individual who gets in to this psychic epidemic. People began to dance in the streets, exhaustive commotion spread everywhere. Reed illustrates about the experience of an individual when he is in to this plague, by stating what he could listen, see and feel.

"We got reports from down here that people were doing "stupid sensual things", were in a state of "uncontrollable frenzy", were wriggling like fish, doing something called the "Eagle Rock" and the "Sassy Bump"; were cutting a mean "Mooche," and "lusting after relevance."We decoded this coon *mumbo jumbo*."(*Mumbo Jumbo* 4)

Jes Grew spread at a very great speed, it got spread in all the nearby places and most of the places were attacked by it. The rapidity increased throughout America through a strange order, Pine Bluff, Magnolia Arkansas, Natchez, Meridian and even at Greenwood Mississippi. Exceptionally in these places crowd began to acclimate the plague in massive numbers.

Sharon in the Academic journal article, *Melus* states that, "Dancing in the novel is, in fact, a parallel metaphor reinforcing "Jes Grew"; and Reed likens specific forms of dance to body laughter. The dances of the Roaring Twenties, like the dances for Osiris and Isis in ancient Egypt, are free, vibrant, and, most significantly, not "serious."

As a writer the author described the ancient dances through mythology, and with various dance forms, which the people in the contemporary world knowingly or unknowingly follow. The author has described it through what he listened or through what he read. Reed got enlightened with the dance forms and he handily used the forms in his own writing, through this procedure he opened up a new form of dance which is a plague, which constitutes this typical form of Jes Grewing with the readers of his illustrious work *Mumbo Jumbo*

"The foolish Wallflower Order hadn't learned a damned thing."(*Mumbo Jumbo* 6) The Wallflower order tried vigorously to put this Jes Grew out. The main reason behind this is they do not understand that Jes Grew is an anti-plague and it is not a harmful one created by God, it is considered to be a pleasurable creation of God. People got adapted to it; obviously the Jes Grew carriers felt that they get enlivened instead of becoming weak. Reed efficiently introduced a plague which is unique in its features, but he underscores the positive aspects of it, which is evident through its host.

Wallflower order went to an extent of summoning the Knights to fight against the Jes Grew. The Wallflower order then appointed a new president to fight against Jes Grew. The president appointed, gave assured words that the plague will be out, once he enters his office. In spite of his assured words given, he is spied by the attorney general. There is a search for the talking

android, which will work to destroy the Jes Grew; the android's host will be a Negro man. Wallflower order is the group which could not obtain and modify with the expeditious shift, which this plague will bring in to their society. Therefore they feud with the plague, by formulating an effective mission to eradicate this epidemic.

"Race Riots between Whites and Negroes. The Whole Reflecting an unhappy Country when Harding Became Its President." (*Mumbo Jumbo* 21). Adapting to the happenings during the time in which Harding became the president of United States was detestable. The age of Harding was the age of race. People were idlers and everywhere there was evils prevailed, both business and the common life style were affected. This is the place where the author forewarns the readers to think about in a dog show, when the dogs were taken care by the owners and the hound creates a heavy noise and with the large steps reaches its opponent. The things stack up for common people was very poignant.

"Disunity Caused by the End of the More or Less Artificially Built-up Unity of the War period" (*Mumbo Jumbo* 21). The people were in sheer tired because of the end of war time, price hike began to fall and because of it most of them ended with fear and insecurity. During that period there were prevalent strikes like Boston police strike, steel strike and rent strike, there were race problem between Whites and the Negroes.

When Reed expounds about the political habituation of common people, in his work *Mumbo Jumbo* the time was totally degrading during the time of Harding. Reed demonstrates that not only the common people but the complete economic condition of the country was dreadful during the period of Harding, people struggled a lot to accustom with the atrocious transitions happened.

Papa Labas, this character plays the lead role when contesting the perception of habituation, Critics called his cathedral by the name *Mumbo Jumbo*. He travelled in his automobile, he helped others, he was familiar in Harlem, and he was also considerable in feeding the loas. "On a long table in the Mango Room are 22 trays which were built as a tribute to the Haitian loas that LaBas claimed was an influence on his version of the work." (*Mumbo Jumbo* 28). In his cathedral in different rooms people practiced yoga positions and the assistants were allotted to look after them.

In one particular room there were twenty two trays filled with foods, this is considered to be the dinner room for the loas. On his behalf it is very important to feed them, loas will posses different people and the treatment would be given to that person, so that he would not become hysteric. Papa Labas is called as a double headed man because of his identity and uniqueness. The author at a place discussed about this particular character that, if he had thought his art to Freud, he would have done something good than Black Herman who is a famous Occultist. According to Labas Jes Grew is the one which will not leave till it does what it wants. Reed has proved his efficacy in habituating with the detective techniques through this character Papa Labas and the exclusive ways in which this character deals with the happenings of his work *Mumbo Jumbo*.

New York sun was getting extended, its managing editor had been in meeting all day and when he knew that the main news was about Jes Grew which reached Chicago, he gets furious, since the news has been published without his consent. "When he walks into the office and inspects the edition of the newspaper which was done without his supervision, he grits his teeth and blows his top, rushing from the office like a bellowing Bull" (*Mumbo Jumbo* 57). The Headquarters of the wallflower order continuously looked and traced Jes Grew and how does it spread.

"The Wallflower Order is well aware of what Jes Grew wants and what Jes Grew needs. In case they're wrong they have other techniques" (*Mumbo Jumbo* 64). Wallflower Order invented a new television system through which they continuously checked it. At that time the news about Jes Grew came in New York Sun, Mu'tafikah took it as a good chance; most of the items get missed in the museums in the United States. Wallflower order was very busy; it's aides ran here and there attending phone calls. Reed interprets different groups which aims at different things, the members of the group, habituate with the tenacious situations turn up, to succeed in their mission.

When the media was busy with the immediate condition of the country, Mu'tafikah is a group along with its leader, they utilized that particular time as a golden opportunity to execute their plan. They stole valuable art forms from the museum and they distributed the art forms to their respective native places, from where they were taken. The members of that group had conflicts between them, but they worked devotedly to execute their plans in a very successful way. Reed makes it fair to the audience that this group grasps the opportunity in the efficient way to comply with the changes happened during that time period to get succeed.

"Charlotte has struck it wealthy with her Plantation House routine. She possesses a richly endowed apartment as a result of her ability to stop the show. The bathroom features a dresser, the color of ivory, with gold trimmings; a sunken marble tub which has steps leading down into it." (*Mumbo Jumbo* 103)

Charlotte got a new job in the plantation house, and she settled in to a very good house which had all facilities, the house was very modern. She resigned her job at *Mumbo Jumbo* cathedral, and joined at the plantation house for a new job. She got accustomed to that place and because of that adaptation; she was able to formulate her normal life to an upgraded step. Reed through this character Charlotte explicates that, an individual who habituates with the changes happen in his or her life; with an optimistic mind to get succeed will gain satisfaction.

The book talks about politics, suppression of people, haunting loas, satire and tradition. The key concept is Habituation, in accordance to the mindset of the people; they accept this Jes Grew Plague. It is up to the people to get possessed by the plague or to avoid it. Even at the end of *Mumbo Jumbo*, author does not put an end to this Psychic epidemic but he utters through Papa Labas that it might emerge again, but he is not sure with the time period of its effect. It might take days together, a few months or even years. Adaptation takes the prime role, most of the characters are accustomed to their place and they overcome the struggles, but the characters who could not adapt to their place and to the happenings around them, struggles a lot and they ends up in a heartrending condition.

Even in the contemporary world, the people who adjust with the condition which prevails around them will be considered to be the efficient ones. Most of the time people, who could not adapt with their surroundings, will have disputes both physically and psychologically. Habituating to the place and situation will take place only through pacification, an individual should be able to pacify his or herself to get through the hellacious situation if arrives. Reed through his exclusive work *Mumbo Jumbo* brings in the mirror view of the current world. It is the prime reason why the readers obtain and relish the whole concept of Ishmael Reed in contentment.

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