



THE REAL INCARNATION OF PARTICULAR CHARACTERS IN *WHAT THE WINE SELLERS BUY*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze particular characters in *What the Wine Sellers Buy* the play which is written by Ron Milner's concept in facing the whites' bad treatment against the black people. Milner tries to write about characters who protect their own rights. In *What the Wine Sellers Buy* Milner deals with the blacks who are proud of their humanity.. He did his best in translating his intellectual powers into communicatively readable works of art. This paper reflects Milner's belief to his black people of facing the white's evil morally, not by violence. Milner has great moral concerns for his people. Consequently, Milner's plays come as a mirror to social experience and a catalyst of social and moral ameliorative change. Through concentrating on Milner's *What the Wine Sellers Buy*, this paper tries to show how Ron Milner respects the good qualities which he considers intrinsic virtues of the black man; qualities such as dignity, nobility and courage. Thus, Ron Milner takes care of, not only with a morality corrupt society, but also of black Americans, as paragons of excellence for other blacks who construct their lives out of decisions made. Milner presented domestic dramas about ordinary people. Ron Milner is a dramatist who states not only what is, but what can and should be. 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. This paper reflects Milner's concept of morality through analyzing some specific characters in his famous play *What the Wine Sellers Buy*

Introduction

Milner draws positive images as a peace maker, a lover and a warrior. He wanted to impress the black audiences with indelible and ineradicable images of self-denial and unselfishness. Throughout

his plays, Milner is concerned principally with social ills, and with their degenerative effects on individuals. Milner, like the great dramatists before him, is concerned with morality, with social corruption, and with man's eternal search for Truth.

The integrity, insight, and power of his work are beyond questionability.

The morality play is a genre of Medieval and early Tudor theatrical entertainment. In their own time, these plays were known as interludes, a broader term for dramas with or without a moral. Morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personifications of various moral attributes who try to prompt him to choose a godly life over one of evil. The plays were most popular in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. Having grown out of the religiously based mystery of the Middle Ages, they represented a shift towards a more secular base for European theatre. Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtuosus* (English: "Order of the Virtues") composed c. 1151, is the earliest known morality play by more than a century, and the only Medieval musical drama to survive with an attribution for both the text and the music. Morality plays typically contain a protagonist who represents either humanity as a whole or a smaller social structure. Supporting characters are personifications of good and evil. This alignment of characters provides the play's audience with moral guidance. Morality plays are the result of the dominant belief of the time period, that humans had a certain amount of control over their post-death fate while they were on earth.

In early English dramas Justice was personified as an entity which exercised "theological virtue or grace, and was concerned with the divine pronouncement of judgment on man" However, as time progressed, more moralities began to emerge; it is during this transitional period where one begins to see Justice begin to assume more and more the qualities of a judge. The Justice in *Republican* begins to concern himself with administering justice on "the criminal element", rather than with the divine pronouncement on a generic representative of mankind. This is the first instance where one may observe a direct divergence from the theological virtues and concerns that were previously exerted by Justice in the morality plays of the fifteenth century. The Justice in *Republican* is personified as a "civil force rather than a theological one". An evolution of sorts takes place within the morals and

agendas of Justice, he begins to don on the Judicial Robe of prosecutor and executioner.

Particular characters in *What the Wine Sellers Buy*

Reminiscent of *The Castle of Perseverance*, where covetise gives Mankind destructive directions, Rico assumes the role of teacher except that all his teachings are twisted truths and half-truths worked out deliberately to captivate and entice young innocent Steve. He first stuns Steve with a new concept of "pimping" Commenting on Steve's description of Mae as "too nice for that," Rico goes on in a tirade:

It's the truth. And you too nice too aren't you? Too nice to take hold of that young girl and make something for yourself outtalk her. Too nice hustle her. But not too nice to pimp off you' own mama! (Steve first is stunned to silence, then reacts with both indignant rage, and a sense of guilt.).....You heard me! Pimping off her! She's working herself to death to buy you clothes, get you lunch money and carfare an all the while you jus sit back an wait for her to bring it to you. Yeh, pimpin, nagger! Pimpin! That's what you doing: pimpin Yo own, mama! (Steve stumps at table, crushed by powerful, new degrading concept of life.) (P.40)

Rico makes the best use of Steve, who is now completely under his spell. Now that Steve is in his full grasp, Rico inculcates in him the first lesson in pimping. He draws for him plans as for the first step. He urges the hesitant Steve to tell Mae to do it for his sake. Reminiscent of Mephistopheles in Marlowe's *The Tragic History of Dr. Faustus*, Rico begins his crooked theorizing:

Make her do it. Only two kinds of people in this world; these standing waiting to be told when and how to move, and these wit guts enough to jump in and tell 'em when and how. And that's you and her, Steve: her waiting you telling...(P. 41)

Rico here classifies the world into two main classes, the first is (the blacks) who are waiting the orders of others to move and to work. The second is

(the whites) who are giving orders and jumping over blacks. Milner here wants the blacks to be aware of such white demon. According to Rico, the value of everything is gauged materialistically. A book may be important only if "somebody might've left ten, fifteen dollars in it ... Never can tell what you might find in a book" (P.20). He firmly believes in the Machiavillian dictum "the end justifies the means". Addressing Steve, he makes it in clear-cut terms:

I'd rather be locked-up some where wearing stripes, than bead punk out here wearing patches on my ass. (P.20)

He argues that life experience is more important than books.

(to Steve) Tell you one thing you can't find in none of them books.... (Steve looks) .. Guts! –Guts to be not only reading about things. Thinking about things. But guts to be out doing things. Gotten. Things. That's what! Ain't in none a them damn books... (P.21)

Rico goes on with his overturned immoral teaching. He offers to adopt Steve, touching on a vulnerable spot. He wants to create himself as a father-figure for a fatherless teenager. Act 1 closes on Steve's smoking marijuana; an act that shows how far he assimilated Rico's philosophy.

He does so while Rico hails him with laudable commentary; "suck it in, partner. Smoke up. You gone start being a man, right now (Steve takes a draw, chokes; chuckling, Rico slaps him on the back; motions for him to try again. He does" (P.41)

Steve is completely hypnotized. In that state of mesmerism, he yields to Rico's instructions. Upon Rico's instruction: "Get something out of her, every time. Get her use to give to you" (P.43), Steve takes a dollar from Mae. After this follows the next instruction: "then you reward her. You know, like you train a puppy"? (P.43). In that scene, Rico assumes the role of a director who leaves nothing for chance: `

You suppose to be copping her mind! Not her body. You already got that! You want her mind! Her mind! (P.43)

In dealing with the white demon, mind is very important. Milner believes in blacks, good minds, with good knowledge, that's goods manners. Milner masterfully dramatizes the full identification of Steve and Rico. Sometimes, Steve just opens his mouth blankly and simply stares, struggling to find words; Rico takes over. Here, one cannot tell who is who:

Rico/Steve: ... All we got is our youth! Our strength! My head and your fine young body! That's all we poses noggins got. An we got to put em together, baby, an make us something! Get us something! So we don't have to be poses noggins no mo..... (P.44)

Steve even lies to Mae about his smoking marijuana. He repeats in a parrot-like fashion Rico's words; he quotes the latter as if he does a saint. Moreover, he holds a comparison between Rico and his mother and what they represent:

I see that Rico ain't dying. Oh-uh. Rico's really living baby. Jus keeps getting sharper. And his pockets keep getting fatter. Oh, he's just growing right on up like a damn tree... . But my mother, now, she jus keeps gettin dimmer by the minute. One day I'm gon look up and I won't even be able to see her, she'll be done just faded right on out... . It's like Rico said, they've traded her some pennies, Mae, that's all my mother and your mother's life way worth to them geishas some pennies. (P.45)

Mae watches him with a mixed sense of fear, perplexity and confusion. She attempts to fathom how this can be him saying these things. She finds great difficulty in understanding that the speaker is her love, Steve, in whom she put her faith. However, Steve is :

Yeh, please-you know what you gon get for yo nice neat please stuff? What they give nice niggus? ... A whole lotta shame- that's what! Yeh, a permanent place in them.

Long lines at the unemployment office! An the welfare office! An the surplus food liner! That's what nice nigguhs get! (P.46)

With these words, Steve proves himself a duplicate of Rico. He will hear no argument from Mae; he is adamant in his plans: "I'm gon do it like my ol'man, an either be a man with everything I need. Or be nothing at all needing nothing at all. All the way dead, or all the way alive. (p.46) It is quite equivocal at that point what he means by his "Ol'man," whether his dead father or the father-figure represented in Rico.

Mae's statement "I know what the deal is" recalls in one's mind the fatal deal between Mephistopheles and Faustus in Marlowe's play (*Supra*, P. 53). The deal is fatal; it is not even worth it. Hence comes the significance of the title of the play: *what the wine-Steve Buy*. As a matter of fact, the title of the play comes from the *Rubaia of Omar Khayyam*:

I wonder often what the vintners buy One half so precious as the stuff they sell.¹

It is even mentioned as early as Act 1 as a foreshadowing of what will befall the protagonist, Steve Carlton. George, the owner of the cleaners! Shoe shop, which is used as a façade for his and Rico's stuff. Acting high and laughing mysteriously, George quotes:

As it is wine that soiled my robe of honor well, often I wonder watt it is the wine-sellers buy. One-half so precious as what they sell. (P.31)

The resemblance between *Dr. Faustus* and Mephisto-pheles on the one hand and *The Wine-Sellers* and Rico on the other hand is highly pronounced. Like Mephistopheles, Rico wanted Steve to sell his soul and turn his girlfriend-a basically decent person-into a prostitute. Steve like Faustus is willing to sell his soul for materialistic gain. The deal is about to be effected. Steve likes to think of himself, however, as different from Rico:

Rico jus wanna have all those broads, an jus be-jus be a pimp forever, but all I want is you, Mae. And I got some plans... (P.53)

Here , Steve thinks of nothing but himself. According to the playwright, to exorcize the white demon, you should not think of yourself. A black one has to think of other blacks, that's the message of the author. Steve tells Mae his plans of buying a truck and starting an honest project for both of them. The irony is that in that particular respect he is another copy of Rico; as the latter puts it:

You jus like me. Jus like I was when I started. Want in and need in a whole lotto things. And doing whatever I had to get em. Jus like you ... (takes couple marijuana cigarettes from pocket, offers one to Steve who hesitates, then takes it, chuckling, sniffing the cigarettes.) like my man George at the cleaners says ... Wonder what the wine-seller buys one-half as precious as what he sells. (P. 63)

Mae Steve's girlfriend, is a cheer leader on the school basketball team Steve plays for. She loves him passionately. Besides, the family disintegration works on her nerves. Her parents are separated; she lives with her mother and two little sisters in Detroit whereas her father lives in Cleveland. For all these reasons, she yields to Steve, though reluctantly.

On a morality level, Mae and Steve Carlton are reminiscent of *Humanum Genus*, in *The Castle of Perseverance* whereas Rico is a composite of *Mundus, Caro and Belial*. Now that the devil, Rico, has managed to enlist *Humanum Genus-Steve-who*, in turn, attempts to seduce Mae, vices seem victorious. The scales of powers are kept in balance by the virtuous mother, Laura Carlton, and the deacon Jim Aaron.

In his article, "A Black Morality Tale," Edwin Wilson regards *The Wine Sellers* as "First and foremost a morality play." Wilson maintains:

As in all good morality plays there is a physical confrontation between the opposing forces, in this case between Rico and Jim. In the showdown Jim proves to be more than Rico's equal. Steve's mother enters the struggle as well, explaining to Steve that his father, though a hustler, held

something in his life pure, which is not the case with Rico.²

The victory of vice is brief and temporary. In response to the complaint of Mrs. Carlton about her son, Steve, Jim reassures her:

he's all right. Don't have no salt won't have no flavor. (P.19)

Jim is optimistic that Steve is only an adolescent and he is going to get over it just fine. But as soon as he sees Rico, he judiciously sees why Steve's mother is worried. It is quite significant that Jim never refers to Rico as a man or a person, but as "a snake" or a "two-legged alligator" (P. 66). Jim Aaron's words are instructive and enlightening. In the manner of an educator, reminiscent perhaps of Mercy in Mankind, he addresses Steve:

Listen boy; A man who trades his woman to his bread, is got silk-sheets but no bed. (P. 66)

Steve takes his words flippantly and ridicules his advice. However in the manner of the *Bonus Angelus* in the moralities, Jim goes on with his preaching:

If you read the book and just really look at things like they are, you'll see that every woman you hold up as yours is like a carry-on of the first one that was yours. That woman is there now... (Ibid.)

According to Steve , all people (black people) should work hard. Both man and woman should work hand in hand to overcome the white demon. Jim Aaron goes on sermonizing in a morality-like fashion:

Well, you ought to hear it. Because when you look back at that first woman of yours, you see-along with your father-where your life came from. And when you look at whatever woman you choose to be with now, you looking at where your next life, your children, might be coming from. And that ain't nothing to be trading. The tree of life? The refection of you an you life? No, Uh-Uh no trading. (Ibid.)

The jest of his moralizing is still is store for Steve. As the latter stares blankly, Jim goes on in a fatherly manner:

I'm telling you, Steve, you wanna know what a man is. Don't look at his suit, his car, his bank account. Uh-Uh, look at his woman, whatever he is will be right there in her and vice versa. If she's a 'ho then he is too. (Ibid.)

In the same didactic, moralizing tone, Jim introduces the concept of a healthy, hero-sexual relation. Jim is forgiving; when Steve curses him, he simply responds; "Damn me if you want to, but I'm going' to tell you anyhow" (P.67). And he pursues his theory; posing a question and answering it:

You know what she's like, your woman? She's like, what you call it when you got a kind of material but it ain't good enough, finished enough by itself, and you have to put another material with it? What they call it? (p. 67)

It is an effective method of instruction; presenting the moral lesson in a vivid way. Jim Aaron goes on with his lesson; he is determined to see it through:

..... Supplement! Yeh, that's what a woman is: a man's supplement, what he needs to finish himself. And whether he knows it-or not, he chooses her according to what he thinks he's supposed to be: like one might need salt, another green vegetables, another fruit... know what I'm trying to say? ... What he needs to feel finished is firth there in her. His finisher .. if he's trading her, his other half, for a car, or a suit, then he's got to be a whore, see? And a man like that who'd trade all that for something-well, he ain't hardly worth patterning yourself after, following nowhere, now is he? (P. 67)

The lesson given by Ron Milner of good manners to his black people

The lesson given here by Ron Milner is that through good manners black people could easily achieve their target, that's , triumphing over the

white demon. Being exposed to all these moral teachings, however, Steve is still a believer in Rico's way as the way out of his financial dilemma; he still gauges things materialistically; addressing Jim, he indignantly says: "I'll tell you one thing they pay 'ho's better than they do horses." (P. 68) .Hearing this response, Steve's mother angrily demands that he shut up and show some respect.

Jim as the apotheosis of forgiveness, seeks excuses for the rash Steve; he is "jus'young. Going through a bad time" (P.68). The religious mother angrily responds: "You make me ashamed! Sick to my soul! You hear me?! I don't even know you . You ain't my son" (P.68) . The God-fearing woman cannot imagine that her son would talk like that. Her only solution is to resort to God: "Lord, help me, please" (P.68). To her supplication to God, Steve responds blasphemously; he sarcastically echoes his mother:

Lawd, help me! Lawd help me! ... (runs into hallway, shouts.) I am yo', son, Mama! Yeh! And I'm gonna be the Lord around' here! I'm gonna' do the helping' ! Hear? Me! Steve Carlton! Your son! Yeh!... (lights boo, smoking it as he goes out the way Rico went ...) (P. 71)

Of the seven Deadly Sins, Lechery and Covetousness seem to prevail throughout the play. They both seem to be mingled and coexistent in the character of Rico.

This double vice gnawa at the structure of the community. It is epidemic and infectious. The teenagers of the area are misled by the appearance of Rico; they look upon him as a paragon. Once, Steve decides to follow in Rico's footsteps, others will take the same course. Joe, Steve's friend, takes the initiative;

Joe. (offering his palm) we gon'start, pimpin' to niter!sheet!

Steve. (Tapping his palm.) I'm gon' start... Joe-An' baby my debut won't be far behind. That sudden wind you hear rushing' up behind you, will be me an' Frances, baby. Anything my boy can do I can do! (P. 72)

The wind mentioned in the above quotation is referring to the white demon, it's a very strong wind which sweeps every thing. So, Blacks have to think and rethink of getting rid of this white demon. Steve has greatly deteriorated; he has surpassed his master, Rico in the trade of pimping:

Steve ... see, I've told her, she's got to let the cat be in the bed with her see. Otherwise us breaking' in won't mean nothing, see? So I figure once they get that far the old dude will force her the rest of the way. 'Cause, like, she can't holler too loud, and have everybody downstairs knowing she's in bed with the old cat. Understand?

Joe. (A smilingly.) Yehh... say, man, you sound just like a hastler, a pimp. Yehh, man, it's jus' like Rico is standing' there running it to me. Damn. You really got all that shit down ain't you? (P73)

The innocent Mae has also deteriorated. She has gone so far as to smoke marijuana. She even lies to her mother about it:

Mother. I know you smoking' cigarettes, now I been smellin' em around, here. Aren't gon' try to stop you; won't do no good: If you don't smoke'em in here, you'll smoke'em out there. You wanna be a fool an' burn out you' lungs, go right ahead. Done all I could to teach you right from wrong, can't do no more....(P.74)

Milner sends a moralistic message to all the black families to establish a good rapport amongst themselves and cling to one another with cordiality, love and forgiveness. This is dramatically achieved through Mae's blame of her mother:

Mae. I am not had no where to go for a long time... you been done closed the door on me along time ago. And I knocked and knocked but you was so busy screaming' and carrying' on. You couldn't head me. Ever since then I haven't had no where to go. Daddy didn't want me either. I realize that too, now... (P. 75)

When Steve comments on his mother's being upset. "she always looks upset-that's cause she don't have no money" (P. 80), Jim in the manner of *Bonus Angelus* in the moralities, corrects his misconception:

J.A. No, it's not that. She needs to know she did a good job being a mother. She was jus' a young girl all alone with everybody shaking' they heads over her, saying, "I told you so;" when your father got killed. And that's all she's been trying' to do ever since; prove she was a good woman, an' a good mother. (P. 80)

Just as in a morality play, there is a physical combat here between virtues and vices, reminiscent of that battle scene in *The Castle of Perseverance* (which in turn recalls Prudential's *Psychopathic*) (*supra*, PP. 23-4). It is between Jim and Rico; the former as an apotheosis of goodness and the latter in his capacity as epitome of evil. Jim as virtuous man cares for Steve and feels sorry for his allegiance with evil. It is quite significant that Jim takes the initiative and challenges Rico. Jim rejects the way Rico uses Steve as an errand boy; he snatches Rico's stuff. Rico reaches for his back pocket where he puts his pistol. Jim emphatically reiterates his challenge:

Uh-huh. Why don't you go' head, Rico Show Steve what pocket you keep you' guts in. what kind of' guts you got? A thirty-eight? Or a twenty. Two?... (Suddenly grabs him. They fall to floor scuffling. Rico up first reaching for chair, J.A. gets up pointing Rico's gun.) (P.81)

Like *Bonus Angelus* and *Malus Angelus* of the morality plays, Jim and Rico struggle over Steve's soul. The former makes it crystal-clear in his adamantly challenging offer:

J.A. Now, you listen ... you a gambling' man, ain't you? Well, why don't we gamble: your guts against mine, the winner takes this young fool here.

Steve. (*Starting forward*) Say, man, why don't you cut this junk out?

J.A. Stay back, boy, somebody might be bleeding' in a minute... (*A moment of assessment.*) How about it, Rico laser stay away from this boy?

Steve. Man, you can't tell me who to stay away from!

J. A. How about it, Rico?... (*Lowering hand, backing off.*) Told you once, you aren't worth me doing' a jail bit for... (*Moving to door.*) But I got some niggers kill God for a quarter. And you done got to be a nuisance. Better grow some more eyes, nigguh. You gone need' em... (*crosses right to room. Contemptuously, J.A. tosses money and ticket to table.*) (P.81)

That scene is highly reminiscent, as aforesaid, of the great battle between the Evil powers and Good ones, in *The Castle of Perseverance*. At the end of such a Fierce battle, all vices are vanquished. Thus the shameful defeated withdrawal of Rico is typical of moralities where vices always end up as losers. Rico-like vices-plots, tricks and conspires, but in the moment of physical and face, to face encounter, he-like them-flees from the struggle arena. Rico-like vices again-works only in darkness.

Still, however, Steve- the mankind- has some allegiances with the evil Rico. Jim-representative of virtues in general and that of Perseverance and Forgiveness in particular-never loses hope. He assures Mrs. Carlton that everything will be right. Mrs. Carlton is less certain, however;

Mrs. C. you wouldn't be giving' no guarantees would you?

J.A. well, we've got two prayers working' on it. (PP.81-82)

Jim invokes the mercy of God to intervene and rescue Steve from the damnation of Rico's company. Jim feels it his duty to do his best to help Steve. If such efforts are to before no avail, he urges Steve's mother that both should offer sincere supplications to God that He may save Steve's soul. They leave it in God's hands.

It is quite significant that immediately after this hopeful thought is suggested; of referring the

question to God, the first glimpse-of Steve's separation from Rico-is shown:

Rico. Let me talk to you for a minute...

Steve. Leave me alone! All 'a y' awl jus' leave me alone!! ... (Steve rushes out back door, leaving it open. Rico slams door, turns snatches up cleaners ticket, and goes into room, cussing...) (P.82)

With that hint, the denouement of the play begins to take its way, after lengthy episodes of struggle and conflict. According to Edith Oliver, "the struggle for the boy's soul between the hustler, on the one hand, and the boy's widowed mother, a friend of hers, and the girl, on the other, is Faustian in its intensity."³ At that point, that Faustian struggle is loosened.

The image of Rico, as father-figure, is shattered into pieces when Steve knows from his mother that his father, though a hustler, has principles. He adamantly refused his wife's having an "(H) appointment" (P.78) with a shyster to set him free from jail despite the fact that they had no money for the lawyer; he entreated his wife; "stay out of this shit, Laura, you the only clean place I got" (P. 79). The mother's rhetorical question: " Now you tell me if that sounds like some Rico?" shatters his thoughts even more. Bit by bit, he is regarded towards the right way.

Just in time and before anything could happen between Mae and Old Bob, Steve wakes up from his hypnotism and realizes how deteriorated he has become. He cries in a state of disillusionment "Mae!" Mae responds:

Steve. Mae ... Mae ... (Embraces: breaks it trying to clear heads and meanings.) The wine sellers, Mae... The wine sellers, see? ... see if I sell you, what I'm gon' buy, baby, huh? What I'm gon' buy? (P. 94)

The timeliness of Steve's repentance, which is reminiscent of moralities, saves Mae from being corrupted. This is quite typical of moralities. By the end of the play, virtue is victorious. "As in all morality plays, good and the power of love triumph," Betty De Ramus notes, but adds "what

makes *Wine – Sellers* different is that the villain, Rico, is no card board figure who is easily knocked down. He is, in fact, so persuasive and logical that he seduces audiences as well as Steve."⁴ In Rico, Milner did not create "simply the stereotypical black pimp," Smitherman writes, "rather Rico is the devious seducer in our lives, moving to and fro, enticing us to compromise our morality, our politics and even our very souls"⁵ By the end of the play, young Steve is triumphant over the villain Rico and his corruption.

Typical of a morality the play closes on an optimistic note. Steve realizes that Rico make a bad trade. He even denounces him and his twisted ways:

Now, Rico, man. You gon' have to go somewhere else. 'Cause I jus 'Got hip to you, man. I know what you are now, man. A vampire. Yeh! You a damn vampire, Rico. Trying' to suck us all in. get our blood. Yeh, Rico, I'm hip to you now, So, you stay away from me man. I don't want nothing else to do with you. (P. 95)

Steve seems to have passed through the stages of innocence, sin, repentance and salvation. He is redeemed at the end. His moral struggle and predicament have left an impact of wisdom on his young mind. He is philosophizing Rico's stance. According to Steve, Rico:

made a bad trade ... see, to try to get up with them [whites], Rico had to trade everything for money. See, everything that keeps you alive; like loving a woman, or having a friend, or anything like that, he had to trade all that, see ... And when you trade all that, it's like trading away your insides, like trading yourself. It's like being dead. It's like a ghost is wearing those clo's and driving that car. A ghost, baby, a shadow. (P. 95)

According to Addison Gayle, Jr. "Ron Milner's *What the Wine Sellers Buy* is Black domestic drama at its best ... there is neither Black Nihilism, despair and hopelessness, nor the mock epic battle between pitiful Black and ruthless white. "Gayle concludes that the play is" a drama of instruction, demanding

both rational understanding and a sensibility capable of intense emotional involvement, "Steve's decision, to seek allegiance with either Rico or Jim, is "ultimately a moral one with import for the entire Black community. To choose intelligence over ignorance, perseverance over hustling, reality over illusion is finally, to choose life over death. "Gayle rhetorically maintains that the:

dispensers of illusion are Milner's target. Like other contemporary Black playwrights, he has declared war on the twin evils which beset segments of the Black comm.-unity, hedonism and sensationalism. Thus, *What the Wine– Sellers Buy* is a drama of power and intensity, of bold stark realism, with neither sentimentality nor self – pity.

In Gayle's words, the play is "a total experience ... humorous yet profound, emotional yet intellectual, immediate yet timeless."⁶

Roger Matuz regards *The Wine – Sellers* as "a contemporary morality play. "Debarah A. Straub describes it as one of Milner's Morality plays [which] was very successful, both with the critics and with black audiences." According to Cunningham, the play has a "Faustian framework in which the menace to be dealt with is the seductions of street life represented by the pimp."⁷

Similar to a morality, the play is replete with morals and moralizing. Explicit didacticism – reminiscent of Mercy in *Mankind* – is recurrent throughout the play. Mrs. Carlton used to tell her husband: "You have to be patient, work an' plan' (P. 17). When Mrs. Copeland – man – anger of the school basket ball team – sees Joe acts in a libertine way with a girl, she angrily delivers a moral lesson to both boys and girls:

Stop that! Now! – you show these girls more respect than that! ... (To Girl) And you, have enough respect for yourself to make them respect you...(P. 51)

Addressing the boys, Mrs. Copeland takes the chance and enhances emphatically her moral lesson; in response to the protest of the boy that they were "Jus' playin'", Mrs. Copeland firmly orders him to stop and then she directs her speech to all the boys:

What do you think these girls, are?! What do you think *sex is* ? You all act like it's some kind of *status* – symbol. Yes, cars, clothes, and *sex!* – well, slavery and human breeding farm days are over: stud – service doesn't carry the same social and economic significance it used to on the plantations!... (P. 51)

It is quite significant that Mae quotes her when she objects to Steve's immoral plans:

Mae ... like Miss Copeland always say, if y'all don't respect us, then we got to respect our – selves ... (P. 53)

Mae instructs Steve morally; "Steve, it don't have to be that way with us" (P.54). George, the owner of the cleaners' shoe shop, hands Steve the stapled closed shoe – bag (with marijuana inside, unknown to the ignorant Steve;)

George ... Yeh, baby, you know there's an ol' African proverb, goes: By the time a fool learns the games, the players have dispersed...(P. 60)

That proverbial aphorism is a moralistic message to Steve. He should learn the lesson before it is too late. Rico's statement, addressing Steve: "You gotta believe it while you saying' it, "is a further proof of explicit didacticism, though it is here used to refer to twisted ways; however, the moral is there for the audience's benefit that one should have faith in what he/she says; otherwise, it is a sort of hypocrisy. Jim's words to Steve are mostly didactic (*Supra*, PP. 277-9), being the apotheosis of Goodness.

Subjected to such a swarm of didactic lessons and a host of moralizing, Steve Carlton repents his plans; once he repents, the road to salvation and redemption is paved. Walter Kerr considers the play one of the "exceedingly simple moralities in which virtue and vice contend for the souls of ghetto youngsters". Kerr elaborates saying that the play's

exhortations to "stay clean," its neighborhood pieties the same neighborhood pieties, its warnings the very same warnings. At the end of the [play], a lad who has *almost* been seduced by a Mephitic – like figure into pimping his

thoroughly nice girl, reaches out to the girl ... firmly announces: "We aren't going' his way. It costs too much."⁸

Milner is trying to get back to the sense of God first, family second As he puts it in very straightforward terms,

We're trying to get back to the sense of God first, family second, country third, and the self organized around the other three entities. We all need to change our commitment from 'I' to 'We' ... or there won't be any 'I' or 'We'.⁹

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."¹⁰

On the cultural intellectual philosophical level, Milner has been influenced by DuBois, Martin Luther King, Maulana Ron Karenga (Supra, P. 88) and Malcolm X / Malik Al-Shabaz. Milner used to refer to Malcolm X as "the great Malcolm X."¹¹

Malcolm X /Malik Al Shabaz was a Muslim black nationalist who sincerely believe that Islam – with its spirit of moderation, toleration, justice, equality and universality – can heal society from its social and economic ills. He has a great share in the consciousness – raising and pride – developing process among blacks. For he relit that "the task for black people is to control themselves, defeat the enemy, and usher in the new era."¹²

It may sound surprising that Milner is impressed by both martin Luther King and Malcolm X, for they are usually looked upon as representing two polarized extremes. However, this is Milner who looks to the black person in his /her totality; besides, to the eyes of the unbiased scrutinizer, they are not at odds. Rather, they complement one another.

Due to the influence of Malcolm X, Milner calls for a black art that is "black enough." In his

revealing article "Black Magic, Black Art," Milner touches upon the concept of 'true' black art and what is expected from the 'true' black artist. "Affirmations and inspiration," Milner writes, is "what the black artist must mean to the black man." He explains:

Speaking of the qualities of himself and his living-place as truthfully and artistically as he can with no one's standards of acceptance in mind but his own, the artist strikes empathy and identification; there is the reaction of acknowledgment, and the changing and toppling – first inner, with the body personal, then outward through the bodies social, political, etc. – is on the way.¹³

In a beautifully telling statement, Milner asserts that "Black Art can do a lot to topple white, racist American, if it is black enough." What, however, he means by this is not far to seek:

I mean a writer sitting the late and great Malcolm X down with us and letting us hear the to-be's and not-to-be's of a more modern and unique Hamlet. I mean seeing on paper how a black ghetto organizes politically and otherwise against the pressures of government. Police, landlords, and Mafia.¹⁴

As such, Milner defines black literature as 'a literature that asserts rather than reacts; states rather than explains.' Milner elaborates this even further:

When this literature – as did Irish, Russian, French, and earlier American literature – finally comes into being, adding its weights to all the other force factors in the air, there will be a change in the consciousness, the self-sense, of this country, this people; and something must topple, must give way to changes.¹⁵

Milner's art testifies to the truthfulness of his heartfelt statement

On the artistic level, Milner – a communicatively interactive dramatist who

influenced, and was influenced by, other artists – was highly impressed by two major black dramatists: Lorraine Hansberry (1931 – 1965) and Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967). The influence of the latter is, by far, the greater and the more impressive.

In 1975, Woodier King made a documentary film on the black theater. In that documentary film, Ron Milner – due to his important role as a theater professional, playwright as well as director – was interviewed. In response to a question concerning his starting point in the world of black theater, Milner's answer was: "Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." This led King to choose the title of his film to be "The Black Theater Movement: *A Raisin in the Sun* to the Present."¹⁶

Both Woodier King and Ron Milner were highly impressed by the play; in their first comment on the play, both writers uttered something like "This is it, man!"¹⁷ The influence of *A Raisin in the Sun* and its authoress, Lorraine Hansberry, on Milner was inerasable. They both have made him aware of his own individuality as a black. The experience of witnessing *A Raisin* on the stage also encouraged him to pursue his dreams and make up his mind regarding his future career as a writer. Lorraine Hansberry told him through her masterpiece that such dreams were feasible.

It suffices to read any excerpt from *A Raisin in the Sun* to see its kinship to Milner's family dramas especially his first full-length play *Who's Got His Own*. In *A Raisin*, when Beneatha berates her brother, Walter Lee Younger, for permitting himself to be swindled, her mother, Lena Younger, silences her:

Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you aren't through learning because that am not the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in himself 'cause the world done whipped him so.¹⁸

This is reminiscent of Mrs. Bronson, of Milner's *Who's Got His Own*, who entreats Tim and Clara to love their dead father, celebrate his memory and seek excuses for his non-male fide

maltreatment. Milner, like Hansberry, affirms the need for an existence of love within the black family.

Even Milner's latest works smack of Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. For instance, *Season's Reasons: just a Natural Change and Checkmates* revolve around the changes that affected the black community. The former is concerned with the changes from the 1960s to 1970s; the latter is about the generation gap between an older and a younger black couple due to the changes between an older and a younger black couple due to changes between the old and the new, the past and the present. The theme of both plays is reminiscent of Mrs. Lena Younger of *A Raisin*, who addresses her son, Walter, thus:

No ... something has changed. You something new, Boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too ... Now here come you and Beneath talking 'bout things we aren't never even thought about hardly, me and your Daddy. You aren't satisfied or proud of nothing we done.¹⁹

Conclusion

From the above mentioned , 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 easel exorcize this demon. A very Important message sent by Ron Milner is that, by love and forgiveness black people could achieve their goal which is exorcizing such white demon. His other serious moralistic message is that morals and principles, come first. Money is just a means to an end and not an end in itself. There are many things more precious than money such as honor, dignity and all moral principles. He moralizes to his black people to adopt a value system based on morality and God-Fearing. There are values more important than money.

Milner's philosophy is that the light beam of morality and conscience warms one's heart for ever. He has developed the 'God-conscious' art as opposed to the ego-centric one. When *A Raisin in the Sun* opened in 1959, it had a great effect on Milner. It opened doors within his consciousness. He was among the first audience who saw the play. After the performance and in the lobby, he met Woodier King for the first time. Here, the experience of life is more important than reading books. To deal with whites and to know how to protect yourself from the white demon is more important than just reading the books.

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