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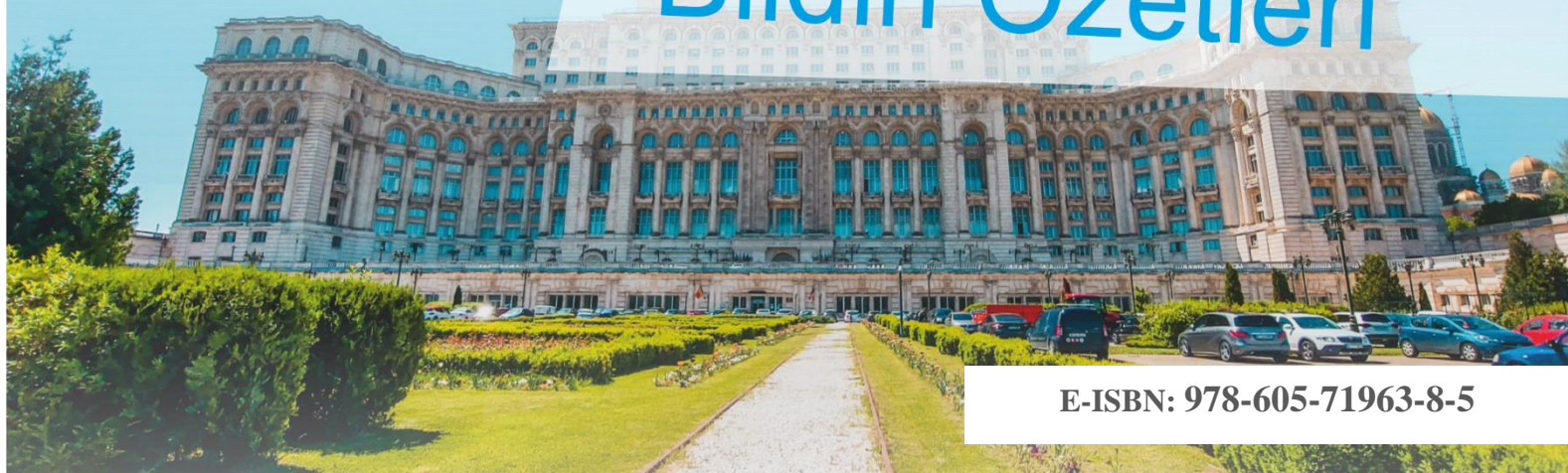
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## Richard Wright's Cacophonous Symphony: Blurring of Realist, Naturalist, Existentialist and Absurd Tones in *Native Son* (1940)

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### Abstract

Richard Wright has been considered as one of the founding fathers of African American novel together with his contemporaries, viz. Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Wright wrote in a period when the influence of the deterministic philosophies of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx ran deep. Mostly classified as a black Naturalist text and a representative of the protest tradition in black literature, Wright's *Native Son* (1940) is the gruesome tale of a twenty-year-old African American boy, Bigger Thomas, growing up fatherless, impoverished, uneducated, and apolitical during the great depression. Bigger is, above all, enraged with the Jim Crow rules conditioning his segregated life in Chicago's Black Belt ghetto. Trying to structure a sense of self-appreciation with the white supremacist social structures surrounding him, the protagonist is doomed from the onset to a dreadful fate within the narrow confinements of his milieu. Divided into three major sections (Fear, Flight, Fate), the novel opens with a typical day in the life of Bigger, delineating his personal profile until his horrific murder of Mary Dalton, the daughter of his new wealthy white employer. Next, his evasion tactics from the authorities and the chain of events leading to his capture are narrated within a 48-hour time frame. The last section of the book spends about a month in the juridical system of American legal structure, during which Bigger is tried in a mock trial and executed in the end.

*Native Son* was later criticized especially by Wright's fellow writers, Baldwin and Ellison, for being too harsh, and the picture of the American black man was too negative to worsen race relations. As a representative of "resistance literature" in Barbara Harlow's terms, the present study analyses the shortcomings of the text in terms of its novelistic artistry, sacrificed for the overtly political message of the author who was a communist when he wrote the novel. Wright thus scrutinizes Bigger's case and the role of society in it from a myopic Marxist point of view in favor of committing to the criteria of the Naturalist voice in literature, where the position of the writer vis-à-vis his subject matter has



been acknowledged as a laboratorian. In that sense, Wright sets up the necessary conditions for his experiment, and yet fails to observe with clinical detachment without involving in his experimentation for the best possible results. With selected scenes from the text, the present study concludes with the argument that although Wright's most renowned novel sets up the formula for the subject-matter of the upcoming generation of Black protest writers of the 1960s, the texts fails to deliver novelistic artistry with its blurring of a motley of literary standpoints and its resolute political message.

**Keywords:** African American literature, Richard Wright, Native Son, Naturalism, Protest Literature.