

## The Struggle between Integration and Miscegenation in *Wine in the Wilderness*

Prof. SABAH ATALLAH DIYAIY, PhD<sup>1</sup>  
English Department, College of Education/Ibn Rushd  
University of Baghdad  
ALAA ABDULRIDA ODA, MA Student<sup>2</sup>  
English Department, College of Education/Ibn Rushd  
University of Baghdad

### Abstract:

*Women throughout history encountered violence and suppression. African American women suffered a lot because they were subject to enslavement and labour. Their sufferings were envisaged in the dramatic works of many African American female playwrights.*

*African-American women suffered as colored enslaved humans and as women who are struggling to survive in a cruel society. Their struggle stemmed from their black race. These women proved their triumph because of their strong spirit and love to life. They fought for their survival, which is something actively linked to their African heritage.*

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. SABAH ATTALLAH DIYAIY is a member of English Department in the College of Education/ Ibn Rushd in the University of Baghdad. She completed her MA and PhD degrees in College of Arts/ University of Baghdad in American Drama. She is teaching English drama for both undergraduate and post graduate students. She supervised and debated many MA and PhD students. Prof. Diyaiy had number of published papers in the academic magazines of Iraqi universities like Al-Ustath, and College of Art Magazines. Email: sabah909ali@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> MA Student ALAA ABDULRIDA ODA is a Master Degree Student in the College of Education/ Ibn Rushd in the University of Baghdad. He is preparing his MA Degree in African American Drama for the Academic Year 2015-2016. He studied in the College of Education/ Ibn Rushd in the University of Baghdad and had his BA in English Language in 1997. He is interested in both English and American Drama. He is also interested in writing articles and researches on various literary topics, Email: alaaalsaady@gmail.com

*African-American women playwrights sought to achieve equality with their male peers. Alice Childress (1920-1994) tries to shed light on the status of women, and her characters include domestic workers, laundry workers, the unemployed, dancers, artists and teachers. Childress envisages emotionally oppressed heroines who struggle to gain their freedom. She uses humour to highlight her core thematic concerns, such as male-female relationships, class divisions within the African-American community and the nature of political and social action. In her play **Wine in the Wilderness** (1969) Childress exposes the false proclamations of black brotherhood and criticises the cruelty of a racist society that does not recognize the other. The events of the play take place during the ethnic riots in the Harlem District of New York City.*

*This article is concerned with **Wine in the Wilderness** (1969). It deals with the black artist's vision about the black woman throughout history. The play is one act play, yet it shows a lot about an ordinary black woman and a cultivated artist at the outset of a Harlem riot during the summer of 1964.*

**Key words:** violence, struggle, racism, suppression, freedom, Alice Childress

## **1.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Alice Childress** was born on 12 October, 1916, in Charleston, South Carolina to **Florence White**, and **Alonzo Herrington**. At the age of nine her parents were divorced. She moved from Charleston to Harlem in 1925, where she lived with her grandmother, **Eliza Campbell White** who became her legal guardian. Accompanying her grandmother, she used to visit regularly the Church where she listened to the poor people troubles and witnessed the social ceremonies of the black community. During those celebrated testimonials poor people told their plights which Childress kept in mind for her future

writings.<sup>3</sup> She attended Public School 81, The Julia Ward Howe Junior High School, and then Wadleigh High School for three years, before dropping out when both her grandmother and Mother died in the late 1930s. She was encouraged by her grandmother to use her imagination. Furthermore, due to her grandmother's instinctive love for arts, Childress visited periodically museums, art galleries, libraries, concert halls and drama shows.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of nineteen she married Alvin Childress who was an actor. He was famous for his role as Amos in the debatable television show, Amos and Andy. In 1957 Alice and Alvin were divorced due to differences in their ideologies. Alvin left her alone with their only daughter Jean, but she got married to her friend and the company composer Nathan Woodard on 17 July of the same year. Childress and Woodard were too dedicated and absorbed artists in theater, but kept close space of intimacy between them which lasted for the end of their life.<sup>5</sup>

Childress owed so much for her grandmother in her teachings and the art of storytelling. As Childress stated in an interview in 1987, quoted in Black Literature Criticism:

My grandmother used to sit at the window and say, 'There goes a man. What do you think he's thinking? I'd say, I don't know. He's going home to his family'.... When we'd get to the end of our game, my grandmother would say to me, 'Now, write that down. That sounds like something we should keep.'<sup>6</sup>

Further, she read the works of William Shakespeare, whose influence on her was tremendous. Childress showed her deep interest for the dramatic works of William Shakespeare.

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<sup>3</sup> Alice Childress in *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers* Ed. Yolanda Williams Page, (Westport: Greenwood Group Press, 2007), 79-84.

<sup>4</sup> Alice Childress in *A To Z of American Women Writers*, Ed. Philip Bader, (New York: Library Of Congress Press, 2004), 51-54.

<sup>5</sup> Page, 80

<sup>6</sup> *Alice Childress Facts*. Retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup>. of August, 2015 from (<http://biography.yourdictionary.com/alice-childress>)

Moreover, for her Shakespeare was a source for creativity and a symbol of life-giving.<sup>7</sup> In her first performing play *Anna Lucasta* (1944), Childress got wide fame. Her play also became the longest running all- black play on Broadway.

Childress wrote, produced, and took the leading role in her play *Florence* (1949). Childress wrote: *Just a Little Simple* (1950), *Gold through the Trees* (1952), and *Trouble in Mind* (1955). She was awarded the Obie Award for the best Off-Broadway play for her *Trouble in Mind* (1955).<sup>8</sup>

Her most controversial plays were *Wedding Band* (1966), and *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969). These two plays brought Childress wide fame among the literary arena because of their critical themes of interracial love and sexism. She also wrote other plays like *The World on a Hill* (1968), *String* (1969) and *The Freedom Drum* (1969) later retitled as *Young Martin Luther King*.<sup>9</sup> Her novel, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* (1973), examined the issues of the teenagers' addiction. The novel was a National Book Award nomination in 1974 and it was classified by the New York Times as one of its Outstanding Books of the Year.<sup>10</sup>

Childress had a splendid a career as a novelist, playwright, director, actress, and activist that lasted four decades. She paved the way for other African-American female playwrights such as Adrienne Kennedy, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange. She addressed the hopes and lives of middle-class African Americans in their strife against racism and their pursuit for social and political justice. Childress died of cancer August 14, 1994, in New York City.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bader, 53

<sup>8</sup> Kathy A. Perkins, *Selected Plays Alice Childress* (New York: Northwestern University Press, 2011), XVIII.

<sup>9</sup> *Alice Childress in The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, Ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001),97-99.

<sup>10</sup> Bader, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Page,82.

## 1.2 Wine In The Wilderness (1969)

*Wine In The Wilderness* was written in 1963 and was first produced by Luther James with a grant from the Ford Foundation in 1969. It obtained a wide success for its humor and serious theme of black womanhood. The State of Alabama banned the play in 1969 because of its critical humorous language and radical themes about gender, class and race. The play tackled events that took place during the civil rights era.<sup>12</sup> This era covers the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. It witnessed great demonstrations and riots calling for civil rights and equality of the blacks in America. Many African-American political leaders appeared on the political life of the blacks. They sought better opportunities for African Americans. Childress's play tackled the role of some of those political figures such as the politician Adam Clayton Powell (1929-1968), Martin Luther King (1929-1968), and Malcolm X (1929-1968).<sup>13</sup>

Childress was a committed playwright who called for equality and civil rights in America. For that reason, she created multi-dimensional heroines to represent poor blacks in America. She said:

But it is serious self-deception to think that culturally ignoring those who are poor, lost and/or rebellious will somehow better our "image." If we will not see them, we must also fail to see ourselves. The wrong is not in writing about them, but in failing to present them in depth, in denying their humanity, in making them literary statistics in social studies, and in using them in street stories as humor or relief. Black writers cannot afford to abuse or neglect the so-called ordinary

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<sup>12</sup> David Galens, *Drama for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Dramas* (New York: The Gale Group: 2000), 1-68.

<sup>13</sup> Galens, 1-68.

characters who represent a part of ourselves, the self twice denied, first by racism and then by class indifference .<sup>14</sup>

In her, ***Dialectical dialogues: Performing blackness in the drama of Alice Childress***, Soyica Diggs believed that ***Wine in the Wilderness*** was Childress's clear illustration of race, class and gender for the African-Americans in America.<sup>15</sup> Childress brought about a mixture of characters to show the authentic image for black women within the African-American community. She chose the working class and middle class as a two-fold image of the blacks in America. Bill Jameson who is an African-American painter who works on his **trptych** painting.<sup>16</sup> He sits in his studio apartment to avoid the bullets.

His friends Cynthia and Sonny-man call to tell him about Tommy, a woman they met in a bar that could be a perfect model for Bill's triptych painting. Oldtimer is another friend of Bill, who comes with a bundle of looted food basket. He said to Bill that he only took the remains of the chaos of the riot. He is afraid of being arrested for the loot. At the beginning, Bill feels angry with Oldtimer for the bad act of loot and advises him to keep his problems away from his apartment. After that, Bill hides away the looted food for Oldtimer. Then, Oldtimer

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Kathy A. Perkins, ***Selected Plays Alice Childress*** (New York: Northwestern University Press, 2011), XXVI.

<sup>15</sup> Soyica Diggs "Dialectical Dialogues Performing Blackness In The Drama Of Alice Childress", in **Contemporary African American Women Playwrights: A Casebook**, ed. Philip C. Kolin, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 29.

<sup>16</sup> **Triptych -Pronunciation:** /'triptik/ A picture or relief carving on three panels, typically hinged together vertically and used as an altarpiece. It also 'depicts the Crucifixion'- A set of three associated artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be appreciated together. Originally, the term may returns to the Mid-18th century as it was used to denote a set of three writing tablets hinged or tied together. (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/triptych> ) Retrieved on 30th. of March,2016.

shares Bill a bottle of Whisky which is one of the things he has looted.<sup>17</sup>

Bell speaks about his "triptych," painting, which is a series of three paintings entitled, "Wine in the Wilderness". He tells him that the first painting, is about "Black Girlhood," and the second is about his idealized vision of "Mother Africa," the beautiful African-American queen, named "***Wine in the Wilderness***". The third painting is about a vulgar and poor African-American woman.<sup>18</sup>

On seeing Bill, Tommy thinks that he is interested in her romantically. When Bill's friends left his apartment, Tommy spends the night with him talking about different issues. Bill likes Tommy and is astonished about her simple, but authentic education about the black race and the history of the United States of America. In the morning, Oldtimer comes to Bill's apartment and sees Tommy. He tells her that she is expected to be the poor, uneducated and vulgar woman in Bill's painting. Tommy gets furious and accuses Cynthia and Sonny-man and Bill of looking down upon the poor and uneducated masses. She defends her social working class and asserts the beauty a woman has regardless to color and class.<sup>19</sup>

Eventually, Bill changes his opinion of her and decides to paint her in a noble form. She is not the poor and vulgar woman, but instead she is "Mother Africa ...black woman in her noblest form". (***Wine in the Wilderness, P.38***).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> y E. Cranshaw, "African Queens and Messed-Up Chicks: Representations of Identity in Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*." In **Reading Contemporary African American Drama Fragments of History, Fragments of Self**, ed. Trudier Harris, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.Press,2007),59-78

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Olga Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination in the Plays of Alice Childress1949-1969**. Diss. U of Rochester, 1998. 202-39.

<sup>20</sup> Alice Childress, **Wine In The Wilderness** (New York: Dramatists Play Service Press, 1969), 38. Further quotations from the play appear parenthetically in the text with Page number.

### **1.3 Images of Struggle between Integration and Miscegenation in *Wine In The Wilderness***

The setting of the play is the evening of a race riot in Harlem, New York, United states of America in the 1960's. It opens with Bill Jameson, an artist who is fully occupied in his studio apartment. He creates a world that keeps him away from the outer world of riots:

Plaster broken away from the walls and lathing exposed right next to a new brick-faced portion of wall" show that the "place is now only partly reminiscent of its past tawdry days ...On the platform is a backless chair. The end of a riot is going on out in the street. Noise and screaming can be heard in the distance... running feet voices shouting over loudspeakers. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.5)

Bill reflects a substantial image of the class disintegration within the African-American community. It is clearly seen as he keeps himself a way from the burning events around him. He considers himself superior to other working class people. James V. Hatch argues:

Bill Jameson [in *Wine in the Wilderness*] is the product of the old black bourgeois values. Sonny-Man and Cynthia are also victims of this old social order. They are educated; They consciously or unconsciously label themselves "better" than Tommy and Oldtimer.<sup>21</sup>

Bill believes that riots will lead to theft and looting. He looks to art as his save heaven and freedom can be obtained through peaceful means. He constructs a space bar that disconnects him from his community and people.

Olga Dugan asserts:

Bill is redefining space that separates him from the rest of his community. The African throw sculptures and hangings, a Chinese incense-burner, a Mexican serape, and other cultural

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in James V. Hatch, **Black Theater, U.S.A: Forty-five Plays by Black Americans 1847-1974**. (New York: The Free Press 1974),737

paraphernalia reflecting “an interest in other darker peoples of the world ironically reveals a further distance between himself and the real world just outside.”<sup>22</sup>

Oldtimer, an elderly street tramp, arrives with some looted goods. Bill blames him for disturbing his world: “If the cops are searchin’ why you want to dump your troubles on me” he apologizes to Bill:

I don’t blame you for bein’ fed up with us,” ‘fella’ like you oughta be fed up with your people sometime... But lain' really stole nothin", Bill, cause lain' no thief. Them others... they smash the Windows, they run in the stores and grab and all. Me, I pick up what they left scatter in the street. Things they drop ... things they trample underfoot what's in the street ain' like stealin'. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.7)

Bill tries to forget about the rebellion of the blacks against racist oppression. He keeps himself busy with his triptych painting. The portrait expresses his vision of the ideal black womanhood image. His triptych consists of three paintings that stand for one subject. It envisages a proposed social disintegration of black womanhood from stages of innocence and perfection to complete ruin.<sup>23</sup>

Bill shows and explains the three parts of the painting to Oldtimer .The first canvas, “**Black Girlhood,**” is of a charming little girl who stands for innocence and childhood:

BILL: (Uncovers one of the canvases and reveals painting of charming little girl in Sunday dress and hair ribbon) ...I call her "Black girlhood."

OLDTIMER: Awwwww, that's innocence. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.8)

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 203.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, 60.

The second canvas is for a beautiful woman with deep mahogany complexion.

Bill compares his idea of perfect black womanhood with physical features and skills:

BILL: Slow down, Oldtimer, wait till you see this. (Covers the painting of the little girl, then uncovers another canvas and reveal a beautiful woman, deep mahogany complexion; she is cold but utter perfection, draped in startling colors of African material, very 'Vogue' looking. She wears a golden head- dress sparkling with brilliants and sequins applied over the paint.) There she is ... "Wine In The Wilderness" ... Mother Africa , regal,black womanhood in her noblest form.

**(*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.9)**

Bill links the image of this canvas "**Mother Africa**" with a myth. It says that a woman's value equals the pleasure she affords for the man. He returns this myth to the Abyssinian maiden.<sup>24</sup> She is mentioned in Omar Alkhayam's poetry with references for the lustful atmospheres that shape the love affair between the maiden and her man:

Once, a long time ago, a poet named Omar told us what a paradise life could be if a man had a loaf of bread, a jug of wine and . . . a woman singing to him in the wilderness. She is the woman; she is the bread; she is the wine; she is the singing. The Abyssinian maiden is paradise,. .. Perfect black womanhood **(*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.5)**

Bill metaphorically compares black womanhood to luxurious bread and wine of the famous poet Omar Khayyam. The Abyssinian maiden sings for her man. To him she is the bread and wine. In other words, she is not only his singer and source of amusement but she is his paradise. Bill sees this mythical

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<sup>24</sup> **Omar Khayyam**, (born May 18, 1048, Neyshābūr, [now Iran]—died December 4, 1131, Neyshābūr. Omar's fame in the West lies on the collection of robā'iyāt, or "quatrains attributed to him). (<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Omar-Khayyam-Persian-poet-and-astronome>) Retrieved on 2<sup>nd</sup>. of March,2016.

maiden with an eye of a man; therefore he views her with physical connotations. Bill yearns for such an Abyssinian maiden who stands for his lustful desires:

BILL: Then "Wine In The Wilderness" will go up against the Wall to improve the view of some post office ... or some library or maybe a bank ...and I'll win a prize... and the queen, my black queen will look down from the wall so the messed up chicks in the neighborhood can see what a woman oughta be... and the innocent child on the side of her and the messed up chick on the other side of her . . . MY STATEMENT. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.10)

Bill's statement is a middle-class artistic vision based on sexual discrimination for black women. He invents an exemplary figure that nurtures not pride in the black female character, but exploitation of her body. Bill refers to the beautiful woman he once painted as an ideal African woman.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, Childress through Tommy manages to make a vivid image of class integration between the working class and the middle class models. She uses the dramatic tools to bring about their closeness and, at the last scene of the play, their unity. She succeeds to mimic through her characters' union, her society's plights. People started to forget about one another and only care about themselves and class peers.<sup>26</sup>

Bill compares his ideal woman with the African shores:

OLDTIMER: (Pours for Bill and himself.) To our Abyssinian maiden

BILL. She's the Sudan, the Congo River, the Egyptian Pyramids. . .she speaks and her words pour forth sparkling clear as the waters . . .Victoria Falls.

OLDTIMER: Awwwww, that's innocence

(*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.9)

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<sup>25</sup> Harris, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 204.

According to Bill, woman's associations with grass roots and vulgarity reflects how much the African –American woman is ignorant of her feminism.<sup>27</sup> That is why the third image of his triptych stands for a vulgar woman:

BILL: ... she's not painted yet. This will be the third Part of the triptych. This is the unfinished third of "Wine In The Wilderness." She's gonna be the kinda chick that is grass roots, ... no, not grass roots, ... I mean she's underneath the grass roots. The lost woman, ... what the society has made out of our women. She's as far from my African queen as a woman can get and still be female, she's as close to the bottom as you can get without crackin' up She's ignorant, unfeminine, coarse, rude ... vulgar. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.9)

This proposed image of the absurdity of the black woman is the outcome of the American society. She is exhausted by rooted plights of enslavement and the consequences of the ongoing civil rights riots where all blacks are inferiorly treated.<sup>28</sup> Due to that she is seen as the woman that sonny man finds in the bar:

BILL: And Sonny-man just called to say he found her runnin' round in the middle- a this riot, Sonny-man say she's the real thing from underneath them grass roots. A back- country chick right outta the wilds of Mississippi, ... but she ain' never been near there. Born in Harlem, raised right here in Harlem, but back country. Got the picture?

OLOTIMER: (Full of laughter.) When ... when ... when she get here let's us stomp her to death. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.10)

The spontaneous humorous tone of Oldtimer indicates the same humiliation view of the black's community for the black woman

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<sup>27</sup> Christy Gavin, **African American Women Playwrights A Research Guide**. (New York: Garland Publishing NC. Press, 1999) ,44.

<sup>28</sup> Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, **All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave** (New York: The Feminist Press, 1992) ,xviii – xxxi..

.Oldtimer links this image with his first wife who stands by the end for the black stereotype woman. Childress gives her heroine a masculine name to add a sense of endurance to her heroine and more peculiarity as well.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, masculinity is connected with tolerance and patience that one usually needs to face the hardships of life. Further, Childress tends to use the names of her characters to indicate a certain theme or assure a particular notion. Tommy stands for the poor people and working class, while Bill stands for the bourgeois people and middle class.<sup>30</sup> Tommy when is asked by Bill about her name, replies with a usual humorous tone:

TOMMY: My name is Tomorrow.

BILL: How's that?

TOMMY: Tomorrow, like yesterday and Tomorrow, and the middle name is just plain Marie. That's what my father name me, Tomorrow Marie. My mother say he thought it had a pretty sound

BILL: Crazy! I never met a girl named Tomorrow.

TOMMY: They got to callin' me Tommy for short, so I stick with that. Tomorrow Marie,..., Sound like a promise that can never happen

BILL:(Straightens chair on stand. He is very eager to start painting) That's what Shakespeare said, ... "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." Tomorrow, you will be on this canvas. (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.23*)

Childress has a skillful dramatic style in blending the old with the new, the folklore with the modern and the black with white. She refers to Shakespeare's famous tragic play of Macbeth

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<sup>29</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 205.

<sup>30</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 206.

through the name of her heroine.<sup>31</sup> Bill is bewildered to know that her full name is Tomorrow Marie. She is born in Baltimore and raised in Harlem. She is part of the civilized world of New York just like Bill. Soyica Diggs assures:

Childress's drama extends the aesthetic of the Black Arts Movement, consistently presenting her characters as situated by discourses that define the performance of blackness as the materialization of affective, social, historical, and cultural discursive networks.<sup>32</sup>

Childress presents Tommy for the audience as rude, unfeminine and a working-class young woman:

Tommy is dressed in a mismatched skirt and sweater, wearing a wig that is not comical. but is wiggly looking .She has the habit of smoothing it every once in a while. Patting to make sure it's in place. She wears sneakers and bobby sox, carries a brown paper sack.

SONNY-MAN : (Standing behind Tommy and pointing down at her to draw Bill's attention.) Yes, sireeeeeee.

CYNTHIA: Bill, meet a friend-a ours . . . This is Miss Tommy fields. Tommy, meet a friend•" ours.. this is Bill, Jameson.. Bill, Tommy

BILL: Tommy, if I may call you that ...

TOMMY: ([likes him very much,]) Help yourself, Bill. It's a Pleasure. Bill Jameson, well, all right.

BILL: The pleasure is all mine. (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.11*)

Tommy looks eccentric as she wears a wig. She is dressed in an unfit looking. However, this cannot be linked to backwardness, but to her choice and loss for her house possessions during the riot. Bill seems to be interested in her as a model for his

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<sup>31</sup> "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" is one of the most famous soliloquies in Shakespeare's tragedy Macbeth. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomorrow\\_and\\_tomorrow\\_and\\_tomorrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomorrow_and_tomorrow_and_tomorrow) Retrieved on 4<sup>th</sup>. Of April,2016.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Kolin, 30.

painting. Elizabeth Brown Guillory, in her essay ***Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths***, argues that:

Childress's protagonists are ordinary working class women fighting with might to live a dignified life painted with happiness despite the obstacles of their social milieu.<sup>33</sup>

Tommy is the heroin of the play. She is a social worker who loses her house in a fire accident during a race riot between the whites and the blacks. She asks the firemen to let her in to take the valuable things, but they refuse:

TOMMY:... . Lemmie tell you what the niggers done

BILL: Tommy, baby, we don't use that word around here. We can talk about each other a little better than that

CYNTHIA: Oh, she doesn't mean it.

TOMMY: What must I say?

BILL: Try Afro-Americans

TOMMY: Well, ... the Afro-Americans burnt down my house.

OLOTIMER: Oh,, no they didn't !

TOMMY: Oh, yes they did.. it's almost burn down. Then the firemen nailed Up my door , .. the door to my room, nailed up shut tight with all , got in the world.

OLDTIMER: Shame, what a shame

TOMMY: A damn shame. My clothes ... Everything gone. This riot blew my life. All I got is gone like it never was.

OLDTIMER: Child, when hard luck rail it just keep fallin'.

TOMMY: And in my top dresser drawer I got a my-on-ase jar with forty-one dollars in it. The firemen would not let me in to get it. And it was a Afro-American firemen, don'tcha know.

**(*Wine in the Wilderness*, PP.13-14)**

Childress uses differences in terms in order to emphasize the internal class distinction of the blacks within the African-American community. She wants to reveal the hypocrisy of those who try to deny such distinctions simply by using the

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Brown Guillory, ***Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths***. Phylon, Vol. 48, No. 3, (Fall, 1987), 229-239.

accurate vocabulary.<sup>34</sup> Tommy is corrected by Bill not to use the word 'niggers'. It becomes ironic that the 'niggers or Afro-Americans' have damaged their peer's house in their riot. Tommy knows a lot about the daily hardships of the black people. She believes that any hope for freedom is in togetherness and not in further fragmentation. Childress thereby confirms the disintegration within the African-American community. Tommy is introduced to Oldtimer. she is more realistic than the other characters:

BILL: ...Another friend-a ours, Oldtimer.

TOMMY: (With respect and warmth.) How are you, Mr. Timer

BILL: (laughs along with others, Oldtimer included.) What you call him, baby

TOMMY: Mr. Timer, ... ain't that what you say? (They all laugh expansively.)

BILL: No, sugar pie, that's not his name, . . . we just say..

Oldtimer, that's what everybody call him

TOMMY: That's cute, but what's your name?

BILL: His name is.. er .. er .. What is your name?

SONNY-MAN: Dog-bite, what's your mime, man?

(There is a significant moment of self-consciousness as Cynthia, Sonny and Bill realize they don't know Oldtimer's name

OLDTIMER: Well, it's ... Edmond L. Matthews.

TOMMY: Edmond L.. Matthews. What's the L. for?

OLOTIMER: Lorenzo, .. Edmond Lorenzo Matthews.

TOMMY: Pleased to meetcha, Mr. Matthews.

(*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.12)

Tommy in her inquiry about Oldtimer's real name embarrasses the other characters. Though they are his friends, yet they do not know his real name. They merely call him Oldtimer as he belongs to the working class. Tommy and Oldtimer easily communicate and become acquainted. Still, both seek to live their life without modulation. While others are away from their

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 230.

community. James V. Hatch comments on the characters of the play:

The only "real" people in the play are Tommy and Oldtimer. They are both honest, not living under the illusion of false reality. True, Tommy "hopes" that Bill will seriously fall for her, but if he doesn't, she is prepared to move on: "... don't nothin' happen that's not suppose to." She is a sensible woman without pretense.<sup>35</sup>

Childress presents a critical evaluation of the relationships among African-American men and women. Class distinction phenomenon demolishes self-recognition within the African-American community. Childress is aware of these everyday life facts that haunt the people's thinking and change their way of communicating among one another. Tommy's natural closeness with Oldtimer indicates the "Drama of Life " that Childress forcefully follows in her plays.<sup>36</sup> In their introduction to *Plays by and about Women*, Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch comment on Tommy's character:

Tommy has neither money nor recognition, but she has a vitality and a knowledge of what human beings are and should be. She is a grass- roots woman who has survived the rats the roaches, the riots, and the landlords of Harlem. With Tommy, Ms. Childress has create strong new black woman character to contrast with the traditional strong "Mammy" type Bill's self- serving notion that he is "better' than Tommy not only is defeated but he comes to recognize that her ability to survive is the wine in the wilderness that has enabled the whole black race to survive in America.<sup>37</sup>

There is a clear sense of female intimacy within the black women characters of the play. Tommy talks with Cynthia about

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Hatch, 737.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Alice Childress, "A Candle In A gale Wind " in " **Black Women Writers (1950- 1980): A Critical Evaluation**, ed. Mari Evans, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984),111

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Hatch, 737.

her personal dream to get married to a man who loves her and respects her. Marriage is another renewing plight for American women that the play tackles. Childress refers to political figures in her play in order to add more assertion to the play's setting and themes of civil rights era:

I'll never forget what the Reverend Martin Luther King said..  
"I have a dream." I liked him sayin' it 'cause truer words have never been spoke. (Straightening the room.) I have a dream, too.

Mine is to find a man who'll treat me just half- way decent ... just to meet me halfway is all I ask, to smile, be kind to me. Somebody in my comer. Not to wake up by myself in the mornin' and face this world all alone. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.18)

This indicates the hidden attitude of Childress about her dreams and high aspirations in life that cannot come true.<sup>38</sup> Cynthia advises Tommy not to think of Bill. The latter is from the middle sophisticated class and Tommy is from the working class:

CYNTHIA. About Bill, it's best not to ever count on anything, anything at all, Tommy. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.18)

Tommy talks with Cynthia about her family and personal life. She needs her opinion about any possible way to attract Bill or any man to her:

What's wrong with me, Cynthia? Tell me, I won't get mad with you, I swear. If there's something wrong that I can change, I'm ready to do it.... I come from poor people ... Cynthia, I remember my mother tyin' up her stockin's with strips-a rag 'cause she didn't have no garters. When I get home from school she'd say ... 'Nothin' much here to eat.' Nothin' much might be grits, or bread and coffee.... We didn't have nothin' to rule over, not a pot nor a window.... I'm so lonesome ... I'm so lonesome ... I want somebody to love. Somebody to say, 'That's

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<sup>38</sup> Guillory, 231.

alright,' when the world treats me mean. (*Wine in the Wilderness*,P.18)

Cynthia tells Tommy to change her masculine style and be more feminine. Childress makes use of the exchanged dialogues to show integration within the black female community. Childress tackles this scene from a feminist perspective to assert the beauty of the black woman. She believes that black women must feel proud of their race and color regardless to their class. That is why there is a kind of sisterly feelings and solidarity that show the feminist theory:<sup>39</sup> As shown below quote:

CYNTHIA. Don't chase him ... at least don't let it look that way. let him pursue you

TOMMY. What if he won't? Men don't chase me much, not the kind I like

CYNTHIA: (Rallies off instructions glibly.) Let him do the talking. Learn to listen. Stay in the background a little. Ask his opinion...

CYNTHIA: Tommy, I think you're too good for Bill.

TOMMY:I don'. wanta hear that. The last man that told me I was too good for him ... was tryin' to get away. He's good enough for me. (Straightening room.)

CYNTHIA: leave the room alone. What we need is a little more sex appeal and a little less washing, cooking and ironing (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.20)

Gayle Austin comments on the close black feminine relationship in the play:

There is in this play, unlike so many by male authors, a scene between women, between Tommy and Cynthia, in which Cynthia realizes long before Bill does that the actual Tommy is not of the image they had preconstructed of her. Tommy raises Cynthia's consciousness by sharing her experiences, which strike a note of recognition in Cynthia. This scene

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<sup>39</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 216.

points out that race and gender liberation are separate but related pursuits for black women. The scene is permeated by a sense of honesty possible between women when they are not looked at by men. Such a scene is almost nonexistent in plays that do not portray women as active.<sup>40</sup>

With the development of the play Tommy becomes a vital changing symbol. She is Bill's past of the black race when she reveals her knowledge of black history:

Tommy: You know, the white "Elks" are called "The Benevolent Protective Order or Elks" but the black "Elks" are called "The Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World." That's because the black "Elks" got the copyright Arts but the white "Elks" took us to court about it to keep us from usin' the name. Over Fifteen hundred black folk went to jail for wearin' the "Elk" emblem on their coat lapel. Years ago, that's what you call history

BILL: I didn't know about that. (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.29*)

Through an intimate conversation with Bill, she recalls the oppressed history of the blacks in America. She tells Bill of an impressive moment in her life. She remembers how her uncle and fifteen hundred blacks were imprisoned as they wore the "Elk" emblem on their coat lapel. Only the whites were allowed to wear that emblem.<sup>41</sup> Childress asserts the Post-Colonial theory in this scene where racism has its roots present among the lives of the characters. She depicts the racist relationship between the Blacks and Whites in the American society at that time:

BILL: The black "Elks" bought the John Brown Farm? What did they do with it?

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Gayle Austin "A women only scene in *Wine in the Wilderness*", in **Drama for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Dramas**, ed. David Galens, (New York: The Gale Group: 2000), 38..

<sup>41</sup> Harris, 66.

TOMMY: They built a outdoor theatre and put a perpetual light in his memory, ... and they buildin' cottages there, one named for each state in the union and ...

BILL: How do you know about it ?

TOMMY: Well, our "Elks" helped my cousin go through school with a scholarship. She won a speaking contest and wrote a com position titled "Onward and Upward, O, My Race."That's how she won the scholarship Careen knows all that Elk history

BILL: (Seeing her with new eyes.) Tell me some more about you Tomorrow Marie. I bet you go to church.  
**(*Wine in the Wilderness, P.29*)**

Tommy shows her closeness to him via recalling the African-Americans' heritage:

TOMMY: Not much as I used to. Early in life I pledged myself in the A.M.E. Zion Church.

BILL: (Studying her face. seeing her for the first time.) A.M.E.

TOMMY: A.M.E. Thai's African Methodist Episcopal. We split off from the white Methodist Episcopal and started our own in the year Seventeen hundred and ninety six. We built our first buildin' in the year 1800. How about that?

BILL. That right? **(*Wine in the Wilderness, P.29*)**

Tommy is jealous of a portrait of a blond woman:

TOMMY: Do you have a girl friend? And who is she?

BILL: (Now enjoying himself to the utmost.) Naw, naw, naw, doll. I know people, but none a this "tie-you-up-and-I own you" Jive. I ain't mistreatin' nobody and there's enough-a me to go around. That's another thing with our women, ... they wanta latch on. Learn to play it by ear, roll with the punches , cut down on some-a this "got-you to-the-grave" kinda relationship. Was today all right? Good, be glad ... take what's at hand because tomorrow never comes, it's always today. (She begins to cry.) Awwww. I didn't mean it that way ... I forgot your name. (He brushes her tears away.) You act like I belong to you. You're Jealous of a picture?

TOMMY: That's how women are, always studyin' each other and wonderin' how they look up 'gainst the next person.

BILL: (.A bit smug.) That's human nature. Whatcha Call a healthy competition. (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.29*)

Tommy feels that Bill belongs to her. When she sees the portrait of a blond woman, she thinks her to be his girlfriend. Bill denies having any girlfriends. He criticizes black woman's possessive nature who tends to love her man wholly as if she owns him. Bill compares Tommy's interest in him to that of the young people's relationships in the Age of Jazz.<sup>42</sup> He also refers to the Carpe diem Theme, asserting the idea that black woman live her day, seize its chance and forget tomorrow.<sup>43</sup>

Bill answers a call of an art dealer and he tells him that his painting will be ready for the next art exhibition. He describes the beauty of his triptych entitled "*Wine in the Wilderness*":

She's here with me now... She sparkles, man, Harriet Tubman, Queen of the Nile ... sweetheart, wife, mother, sister, friend.... The night ... a black diamond. .. A dark, beautiful dream ... . A cloud with a silvery lining ... Her wrath is a storm over the Bahamas. "Wine In The Wilderness ",The memory of Africa ... The now of things ... but best of all and most important. . . She's tomorrow ... she's my tomorrow. ( *Wine in the Wilderness, P.28*)

Tommy misjudges Bill's phone call. When the latter compares his portrait with the African shores and Black history, she is surprised to hear the various cultural metaphors he uses. He attributes to her things that are concerned with the struggle of women.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> **Jazz Age** was a period in the 1920s, ending with the Great Depression, in which jazz music and dance styles became popular, not only in the United States, but also in Britain, France and elsewhere. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz_Age) Retrieved 5<sup>th</sup>. Of April,2016.

<sup>43</sup> Carpe diem means "Seize the day, put very little trust in tomorrow (the future)". Retrieved on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Of April, 2016 from ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe\\_diem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe_diem)).

<sup>44</sup> Guillory, 234.

Tommy overhears “tomorrow” and thinks that he means her. Bill describes the second picture in the painting of the African Queen not Tommy. He is a bourgeois and an artist who sees his “tomorrow” as a colonizer. He envisages the beauty of black womanhood through physical features and skills.<sup>45</sup> Bill's voice during the phone call is full of love and admiration. This inspires her to change her hair style:

(She emerges from "behind the screen .Dressed in the wrap, sans wig. He is astounded

BILL: Baby, what..? Where ... where's the wig?

TOMMY: I don't think I want to wear it, Bill (***Wine in the Wilderness, P.28***)

She removes her wig and arranges her natural hair skillfully. She steps out, dressed in an African wrap. She feels taller, more relaxed and sure of her feminism. She feels that she is more attractive and appealing. Bill is surprised by her new image. He starts observes her with a passionate eye. She is able to touch upon his personal views and feelings drifting them towards her.<sup>46</sup>

Bill wants to paint her as a black experience, yet he cannot:

BILL: (Mystified by the change in her, Tries to do charcoal sketch.)

It is quite late.

TOMMY: Makes me no difference if it's all right with you.

BILL: ('Wants to create the other image.) Could you put the wig back on.

(***Wine in the Wilderness, P.28***)

Bill responds differently to Tommy's new shape and he is no longer able to focus on the painting. He wants to recall her first image. Still, he cannot due to the new look:

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<sup>45</sup> Harris, 64.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 65.

BILL: (Throws charcoal pencil across room.)

No good! It won't work! I can't work anymore (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.28*)

A shift in their talk focuses on their mutual past brings about more intimacy between the couple:

BILL: (Sits on bed.) Everybody in my family worked for the Post Office. They bought a home in Jamaica, Long Island. Everybody on that block bought an aluminum screen door with a duck on it . . . or was it a swan? I guess that makes my favorite flower crab grass and hedges. I have a lot of bad dreams. (Tommy massages "is temples and the back of his neck.) A dream like suffocating, dying of suffocation. The worst kinda dream. People are standing in a weird looking art gallery, they're looking and laughing at everything I've ever done. My work begins to fade off the canvas, right before my eyes. Everything I've ever done is laughed away.

TOMMY: Don't be so hard on yourself. If I was smart as you I'd wake up singin' every momin'. (There is the sound of thunder. He kisses her.) When it thunders that's the angels in heaven playin' with their hoops, rollin' their hoops and bicycle wheels in the rain My Mama told me that (*Wine in the Wilderness, P.30*)

Bill starts recalls his family's past place and neighbors. This scene shows the mutual likeness among the black people in the past. The duck or swan placed on the door of every house may represent their longing to be respected and recognized in the American society.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the duck may be used in ceremonies and Christmas Eves in all parts of America and this adds more sense of mutuality and union among the Americans. Childress uses stage direction to emphasize the developing passionate relationship between the protagonists:

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<sup>47</sup> **Swans** are often a symbol of love or fidelity because of their long-lasting monogamous relationships. Retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup>. Of April,2016 from <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Swan>

Bill: I'm glad you're here. Black is beautiful, you're beautiful, A .M.E. Zion, Elks, pink roses, bush flower, ... blooming out Of the slavery of Sweetwater Springs, Virginia.

TOMMY: I'm gonna take a bath and let the riot and the hell Living go down the drain with the bath water.

BILL: Tommy, Tommy, Tomorrow Marie, let's save each other, Let's be kind and good to each other while it rains and the angels Roll those hoops and bicycle wheels. (They embrace. the sound of rain)

**(*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.30)**

This physical intimacy between the two serves to be a main factor for Bill's transformation:

Music is as lights come down .As lights fails down to darkness. Music comes in louder. There is a flash of lightening. We see Tommy and Bill in each other's arm. It is very dark. Music up louder, then softer and down to very soft. Music is mixed with the sound of rain beating against the window. Music slowly fades as gray light of dawn shows at window...

**(*Wine in the Wilderness*, PP.30-31)**

Tommy discovers that she is not the intended image of the triptych.<sup>48</sup> Bill depicts her as the society's cast-off woman. Oldtimer tells Tommy that she is to be the "messed-up chick" in the triptych:

OLDTIMER: No, you gonna be this here last one. The worst gal in town. A messed-up chick that—that

TOMMY: The messed-up chick, that's why they brought me here, ain't it? That's why he wanted to paint me! Say it!

**(*Wine in the Wilderness*, PP.32-33)**

Patricia Schroeder comments on Tommy's realism:

Childress demonstrates that realism can be made to depict cultural context and expose its influence on individual identity two clearly defined projects of materialist feminism. Furthermore, her play expresses a feminist vision despite its

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<sup>48</sup> Harris, 67.

roots in a conventional realism, since it focuses on a female character who refuses to be contained by others' definitions.<sup>49</sup>

Tommy refuses Cynthia's advice to take off the wig:

If you feelin' so brotherly why don't you say 'my' sister? Ain't no we- ness in your talk. 'The' Afro-American, 'the' black man, there's no we- ness in you. Who you think you are?. (*Wine in the Wilderness*, PP.33)

She now realizes the authenticity of what is meant by a woman's outside and inside beauty. Physical beauty is artificial and the genuine beauty for a woman is her pride of her womanhood.<sup>50</sup> Further, She reminds Oldtimer that he is mistreated by them: "You their fool too. Till I got here they didn't even know your damn name." (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.25). They find him amusing, look down upon him and they do not know even his real name. This shows the huge gap between the middle class and working class within the Afro- American community. Tommy refuses Bill's pretended knowledge of Afro-American history. She throws away his books:

"There's something inside-a me that says I ain' suppose to let nobody play me cheap. Don't care how much they know!" (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.33)

Tommy asserts her use of the word 'nigger' regardless of Bill's comment about the incorrect use of the word: "A nigger is a low, degraded person, any low degraded person". He checks the word in the dictionary to find that: "A Negro . . . a member of any dark-skinned people." Olga Dugan asserts that Childress makes her message clear through Tommy's realization:

"Near tears," she explains to Bill the difference in motivation behind whites calling him a "nigger" and her calling him one. "When they say 'nigger,' just dry-long-so, they mean educated

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**,62.

<sup>50</sup> Galens,40.

you and uneducated me,” she begins. And the rest of her explanation is as brief: “They hate you and call you ‘nigger,’ I called you ‘nigger’ but I love you”.<sup>51</sup>

Tommy realizes that their identity, unity and integration, are not to be found in a dictionary. Instead they are their people’s history and defiance of the hate, greed, ignorance, and vanity that separate them. Furthermore, it is found in their determination to build comprehensive buildings like churches, educational centers, schools, trades, and theatres that show their genuine belonging to their country. They must make themselves seen by others as equal participants in the history of a multiple world community. Therefore they need to fight not against each other, but for each other.<sup>52</sup>

Joy E. Cranshaw in her ***“African Queens and Messed-Up Chicks: Representations of Identity in Alice Childress’s Wine in the Wilderness.”*** asserts that:

Bill, Sonny-man and Cynthia are no more than imitators of the false idealism of the white patriarchy... Though Tommy is uneducated and vulgar, but she has profound commitment for her black community. While the others are superficial and have huge detachment from their race.<sup>53</sup>

Bill is encountered by Tommy's question whether he is committed to his black people the same way cares for his art, books and other decorative accessories in his apartment. She uncovers the shame he feels for being black:

If a black somebody is in a history book, or printed on a pitcher, or drawn on a paintin' ... or if they're a statue ... dead and outta the way and can't talk back, then you dig 'em and full- a so much-a damn admiration and talk 'bout "our" history. But when you run into us and breathin' ones, with the life's blood still pumpin' through us... then you comin' on 'bout

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 234.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Harris, 75.

we ain' never together. You hate us, that's what! You hate black me! (**Wine in the Wilderness, P.35**)

Bill changes his view about the last picture of his triptych. He places Tommy's picture in the painting. Tommy stands symbolically for the idealized image of black womanhood and she speaks about her female-race. She obtains a new awakened consciousness. She is able to replace the image of black woman within the African-American community with a sublime token of race.<sup>54</sup> Then, Cranshaw argues that:

Tommy's final place in the triptych is representative of this intermediary position as she does not simply replace the first "Wine In The Wilderness.", While the original triptych is intended as a reflection on "black womanhood," composed of "Black girlhood," "Wine In The Wilderness," and the "messed-up chick," the final version of the triptych represents blackness through history. It begins not with the young girl, but with Oldtimer, whom Bill describes as "the guy who was here before there were scholarships and grants and stuff like that, the guy they kept outta the schools, the man the factories wouldn't hire, the union wouldn't let him join . . ." On the far side are "Young Man and Woman [Cynthia and Sonny-man], workin' together to do our thing." And, finally, in the middle, is Tommy as "Wine In The Wilderness," though Bill refers to her as Tomorrow, granting her the increased femininity necessary for her role in the centerpiece. "Look at Tomorrow. She came through the biggest riot of all, . . . somethin' called 'Slavery,' and she's even comin' through the 'now' scene, . . . folks laughin' at her, even her own folks laughin' at her. And look how . . . with her head high like she's poppin' her fingers at the world".

Bill asserts that her self-reliance and pride stand for her African- American idealism for their race:

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<sup>54</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 234.

(Takes up charcoal pencil and tears old page off sketch pad so he can make a fresh drawing) Aw, let me put it down, Tommy, "Wine in the Wilderness," you gotta let me put it down so all the little boys and girls can look up and see you on the wall. And you know what they're gonna say? "Hey, don't she look like somebody we know?" (*Wine in the Wilderness*, P.38)

Bill realizes that he has misguided viewing the African-American women by such a negative image. He acknowledges that ordinary woman like Tommy is a true portrait for real people in life. Cranshaw thinks that, through the character of Tommy, Childress asserts the plight of oppression of the African-American women they suffer in a male-dominated society.<sup>55</sup>

Still, Childress celebrates African-American women like Tommy, who work and struggle in everyday life, constructing an ideal image for the black womanhood, asserting that such women deserve respect and recognition. Furthermore, Liz Brent comments about the play:

*Wine in the Wilderness* is subtitled "A Comedy-Drama." Throughout the play, Childress utilizes the element of comedy to highlight her central thematic concerns, such as the nature of political and social action, male-female relationships, and class divisions within the African-American community. Although Childress is quite serious about these concerns, she makes use of humor both for its entertainment value and as a means of accenting these themes in a light-hearted manner.<sup>56</sup>

Brent then wants to emphasize how Childress via the use of humor has succeeded in delivering her message about the black womanhood. By emphasizing the use of humor in her play, Childress criticizes the fake unity of the blacks and their

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Harris, 76.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Liz Brent "Critical Essay on *Wine in the Wilderness*", in **Drama for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Dramas**, ed. David Galens, (New York: The Gale Group: 2000), 27.

artificial mutuality. She is aware of how people start to change their traditions and disregard their genuine heritage on the pretext of modernity.<sup>57</sup>

Janet Brown asserts what Childress defends to the African-American woman's right and role within the American society:

The pattern of symbolic action is one of Tommy's repeated assertions of her autonomy, at first unconscious and made from an assumption of inferiority. At the turning point in the play's motivation, Tommy becomes aware of her own self-worth, and converts the society of the play to her values. Agent dominates in this drama, in which Tommy's individual spirit transcends the false ideal of a patriarchal socio-sexual hierarchy. The play is an idealistic, optimistic statement of the feminist impulse.<sup>58</sup>

The play's triple conflict of class, gender and race uncover the black woman as oppressed and exploited. Through her patience and self-determination Tommy succeeds to prove herself equal to man. The African-American woman is valuable for her black community. Dugan argues that Tommy directs critical issues of racism and sexism prevailing among the African-American community and directs them toward a positive image of black womanhood:

In seeking his respect and affection, she pursues equality with him. However, she does so in an elitist and sexist atmosphere.... Tommy's severe straightforwardness indicts Bill's gross misuse of both his talent and his people. It indicts the idea of a black cultural elite endowed with the right to judge and condemn the so-called black masses, which is the hidden message Bill's triptych presupposes. Moreover, it forces the artist to confront a choice: creating art that will

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<sup>57</sup> Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 223.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Janet Brown, "*Wine in the Wilderness*," in *Feminist Drama*, Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979, 56-70.

either perpetuate division between his people, or help to unite them.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSION

James V. Hatch says of Tommy:

The beauty of *Wine in the Wilderness* is in part due to the author's sensitive treatment of Tommy.... Alice Childress has created a powerful, new black heroine who emerges from the depths of the black community, offering a sharp contrast to the typically strong 'Mama' figure that dominates such plays.<sup>60</sup>

Hatch argues that Childress in her *Wine In The Wilderness* masterly delivers her themes and nets her characters. She succeeds to portray a new visage for the African-American Women other than the negative traditional stereotypes images. She manages to make Tommy's self-knowledge awakens Bill to a whole new understanding about himself as an artist. In other words, Childress succeeds in the use of art as a means to achieve sublime goals. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory argues that:

The female protagonist of *Wine in the Wilderness* is "a very spiritual and spirited woman," who "rises to serve as a healer to her wounded community whose psyche is in need of re-Africanization."<sup>61</sup>

Tommy refutes the unjust image of black woman as portrayed by the matriarchal society that she possesses the manhood of the black male. She resists the exploitation of the pretentious middle-class blacks. Tommy rejects the feebleness, domesticity, passivity, submissiveness and voicelessness. She proves herself as an African ancestral link worth of love and respect.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Dugan, **Useful Drama: Variations on the Theme of Black Self-Determination**, 233.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Hatch, 737.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Olga Dugan, "Telling the Truth: Alice Childress as Theorist and Playwright" *The Journal of African American History*, (Winter 2002), 122-49.

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