

THE ADVENTURE OF A BLACK GIRL IN SEARCH FOR GOD

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw wanted to challenge the vanities of human wishes, particularly the Christians who claim that they serve one true living God according to the prescriptions of the Bible. Shaw in his wisdom, decided to use a black slim, naked, African Virgin (a catachresis of a white European girl) to search for God amongst all Christian Creeds. The choice of the Black Girl was because she would not have been contaminated by all ancestral theologies and dogmas of Christianity. The search was fruitless because the Black girl discovered that the prophets of the Old Testament served different Gods. But then, she discovered a biting inditement of Christianity in: the Dirty water theology. This theology implied that Christianity unlike Igbo cosmology in Achebe's Arrow of God, could not discard a God who was not sensitive to the wishes of the people. Having done with Christianity, the girl turned on the practices of Islam: their hostilities against images like carving God or painting Him. Islam's biggest scourge is their treatment of women: why one man could have multiple women, while the woman was restricted to only one man! The Black girl discovered that since the search for God among all Christian Creeds was fruitless, that maybe, the best life was to settle down, get married, plant a garden, weed it and harvest the yields. This would save her from boredom, vice and poverty. The simple life was the best.

Keywords: Dirty water theology, Igbo Cosmology, Christian, Black Girl

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw studied the history of Christianity through the Old Testament Prophets from Noah, Micah to Job. His mission was to find out the true meaning of the universe through the Gods of the Old Testament. His search instrument was a Black, Slim, Naked African girl.

The choice of a Black girl was very suitable because she would not have been contaminated with the polluted dogmas of Christianity from school or her parents. The obvious anomalies in Micah's God should prevent us from still

worshipping Him. But rather than telling this story in a tedious drama, Shaw decided to tell it in Prose: *The Story of Black girl in Search for God*.

Shaw used a slim, naked African girl (a strange catachresis of a white girl) was his search instrument. This girl sojourned through all the great theologies of the Christian world in search for the true God. Her search was fruitless. This futility led her to choose the life style of Descarte's *Candide*: the best of two possible worlds. She decided like *Candide* to settle down to choose the simple life: And she got married, planted a garden, weed it and raised three kids. The simple life was the best.

Shaw made me a believer in reason rather than faith. A believer that man should not marry reason to faith. This would be disastrous because man would be recycling a redundancy of the infinite futility.

The Dirty Water Theology

This was my personal Coinage from Chinua Achebe's Novel: *Arrow of God*. The Ibos, (a tribe in South East Nigeria) in their Theology discarded a God who was not sensitive to the needs of his people: The burden of the Chief Priest Ezeulu. But Christianity muddled this up. The Christians accept all the Gods, from Noah, Micah even to Job, with all their anomalies thereby mimicking the biblical adding of new wine to the old: Hence I coined the term: "*Dirty water Theology*".

"Ibo Cosmology"

This is Ibo religious system as shown by Chinua Achebe n his essay: *Chi in Igbo Cosmology*. (Essays and Responses). P159-169.

George Bernard Shaw: *The Black Girl in search for God: A thematic analysis of Christians and Islam*.

The title of the text is rather unique and even peculiar because it instigates a curiosity and a craving that ends only in speculations and thoughts. In a sense, the search ends before it even begins. The second course for curiosity is Shaw's choice of the search instrument: The Black, naked, slim, African girl. A virgin! The third course for curiosity is, where is she going to find God? A Being that according to Edmond Jabes in his text, *The little book of Unsuspected subversions*, God erased his face after He created man.

Shaw in his wisdom decided that a white, clean virgin would not be a suitable instrument for various reasons. First, a white girl must have inherited all the contaminated Christian theology and dogmas from her parents, grandparents, peer group and even Christian education. A white girl could not escape the nuances of the stench. So, a very suitable candidate for a mouth piece should be a black, naked, African virgin. In this flow therefore, the blackness, the nakedness, and the Africanness melt in smoothly, particularly if one is in a hurry to plant a theology and dogma on a pure tabula rasa!

This is because the blackness of the girl fused with almost supernatural intelligence would be both revolting and intriguing to white Europeans who do not seem to believe that the African has any basic intelligence. And the virgin nakedness would provoke a mixed feeling of joy and revulsion for the sacred and the profane closely related to Adam and Eve. And even the African paganism, a strange catachresis of Christianity because of its intoxication with native fetishism and monstrous rituals should be an ideal choice! But hidden in this labyrinth of speculations is a silent irony. The irony is in the question whether rightly or wrongly, Europe had any right to impart a religion on Africa. A religion that they do not even seem to believe themselves? Because how can one claim to teach a truth and then turn around to disbelieve the same truth! Physician, heal yourself first? These are serious metaphysical questions. And it is to answer them that Shaw sent a black, naked African virgin on the adventure to unveil.

Having dealt with the nagging issue of the selection of a model, a mouthpiece or protagonist for the trip, we must now turn to confront what Shaw calls the Gods of the *Old Testament* and even Jesus Christ! These Gods Shaw claims have various anomalies and even limitations. And they line up a beautiful roll call like:

- i. The God of Noah
- ii. The God of Job
- iii. The God of Micah
- iv. And Jesus Christ.

The God of Noah, Shaw claims was mischievous, brutal and uncaring. Did He need to draw all living things except those that belonged to Noah, and turn around when the universe has been privileged, to demand from Noah, his largest and fattest animals, just so that he could enjoy the smell from roast beef? Could this God not have created the smell of roast beef instead of subjecting Noah to it?

And since these were Noah's fattest rams, did this God not think of the food He was depriving Noah's family? As we struggle to understand the strange behavior of Noah's God, we run smack into The God of Job.

The major problem with Job's God was that He was a poor debater. He could not face Job on the problematic of His creation. What is the problem with the ontological argument about the goodness of God? Why did God create so much pain and suffering in a world created by an Omnipotent and Omniscient God? Is there a possibility of error? Of a mistake after creation! Job's God avoided answering these questions, instead unleashed senseless sneers, bullying and intimidations.

His condescending reply showed Job that his God thinks less of man than a leaf from the tree. The question is Job's mind was: if He thinks of man just as a piece of trash, then why did He really bother to create man? Countee Cullen, a Black American poet, had struggled with these problems about the ontological argument in his poem: Yet do I marvel:

Yet do I marvel
I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did stop to quibble could tell why
The Little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must someday die,
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
- - - - -
- - - - -
Inscrutable His ways are and immune
To catechism by a mind too strewn
With petty cares to

In that poem, Cullen interrogates all the frustrations, doubts, hopes, and even desires often associated with the goodness of God. Cullen questions why a God, who is Omnipotent and Omniscient would create a world with so much pain and suffering. Suffering that does not spare even the tinny insects like the mole. Suffering that even man, a replica of God should die! But to understand the

striking poignancy of his inditement is to reflect on the efficacy of the role of poetry as a vital medium of instruction.

Poetry is medium of instruction for the Diviners, the priest and the prophets. When the diviner unleashes his poetry, it is immediately accepted and consumed by a paid audience. When the Catholic priest prays in Latin poetry to an audience that is ignorant of Latin language, his messages are accepted in a Latin chorus with fear and trembling by his audience. And when the prophet speaks, he speaks his poetry to a crowd, waiting with fear, trepidation and trembling at the ominous content of his message. But when a Black man speaks his poetry to an often racist and hostile crowd, who would listen to him? A poet and Black? And God who is omniscient and omnipotent should know the biting ramifications of a Black man in a Whiteman's country! And so, knowing all these, why should God be so insensitive to make him a poet and ask him to sing to a hostile audience? Now we return to the Gods of the Old Testament.

All the Gods of the *Old Testament* had one fault or another. For instance, Noah's God was greedy, reckless and loved the smell of beef. Job's was a snob and a poor debater. Micah's God was different because His behavior comes close to that of Jesus in the *New Testament*. Micah's God does not care for burnt sacrifices of animals or human. He demands simply that we do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with Him. This God comes very close to Jesus of the New Testament, if we can recall His teaching in the Beatitudes. And what was his basic creed?

His basic creed was that God is within every person. The simple implication is that there will be too many Gods in the universe. A major reason why he was stoned by the Jews. He also taught that you love your neighbor as yourself. And that we are all one in the family of God. A universalism which would be revolting to the Jews who regarded themselves as God's chosen people!

But after considering all the Gods of *The Old Testament* with their diverse limitations, Shaw unleashes a biting indictment on Christianity: The Dirty water theology! Before discussing this strange theology, we must go back to Chinua Achebe's, *Arrow of God* to see how the Igbo's treated recalcitrant Gods in their cosmology. In Igbo cosmology, they discarded any God that was not sensitive to the wishes of people.

And this is where the Dirty water theology comes in. While the Igbos are able to discard a recalcitrant God and pick up a God who would be sensitive to the wishes of the people, the Christians were not that smart. Christians accepted the good and bad Gods, (Dirty water and clean) and so muddled up the whole Theology and Dogmas of Christianity. But unless man invented God as Edmond Jabes claims in his: *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversions*, the reverse would not work! Edmond Jabes and his:

The Little book of Unsuspected Subversion:

God created man in his image,

Which he erased by erasing Himself.

Man not having known the face of God,

A fortiori never know his own.

He knows only the pain of loss.

He knows that what passes for his face,

after all was only the longing for an absent face. Could it be that God's image is that of an infinite erasure? In that case man's image would also be, and their resemblance that of an absent image to an absence of images; a resemblance finally of nothing to nothing.

Trying in spite of everything to have a face means that the creature, in his stubborn will to exist, had to invent it (p. 52)

In that piece, Jabes gives us the anatomy of his doubts about the existence of God. He starts carefully by dislodging the Christian's claim that God made man according to his image. But the problem here is that God erased his face after He made man. This means that man does not know God's image. So, how does he know that he is the duplicate of an absent face? Man is left now only with the pain of Loss. The logical conclusion would be that God's face would be that of an infinite erasure. In that case, man's image will be that of a resemblance of nothing to nothing. Trying everything to have a face without success means that man had to invent God and his face. God according to Jabes is a curious invention by man.

It is quite curious according to Shaw, how Islam is able to evade this trap of: Dirty water theology. They did it by simply deciding to be the "Serpent and the Eagle". And to weed and water the garden. The two animals chosen as their symbols are both dangerous in respective ways.

The Eagle attacks and kills smaller birds. But the serpent is indifferent to who it kills – big man or small man. So when small powerless men in society infringe their laws according to Shaw, they are killed. Infidels and unbelievers are useless so they are killed. By doing these killings, they are using the Eagle to clean the garden. The believers cannot co-exist with useless people which would be a resemblance of “Dirty water theology”. But if the Eagle gets rid of useless little birds, what role does the snake serve. Simple! Since the snake kills indiscriminately, it becomes a universal declaration that no-one is above the law. The simple implication is that the rich or poor are under the same laws and will receive the same penalties should they break it. The garden must be watered and cleaned. The conclusion then is that Islam through ingenious ways is able to escape the: Dirty water theology.

But Islam, having escaped the problem of: The Dirty water theology, was tackled at another front: the treatment of women. The marriage of one man to multiple women. Their rationale is that God ordained that man should take care of woman. But why, does a fair and just God not give women the same privileges to marry many men? Here the Arab persona in the novel admits that though he cannot question God, but he believes that God may have been unfair to women when it comes to marriage ordinance.

To conclude this essay, we had to wade into the history of western European thought, to find out who had dealt with such universal, moral and intellectual problems (10). Two names come to mind: Voltaire in *Candide* and Dr. Samuel Johnson in *Rasellas* and *the Vanity of human wishes*. And George Bernard Shaw in: *The Adventure of the Black girl in search for God*.

Voltaire’s *Candide* started life with a concern that there was too much pain and suffering in the world. He then started to reflect very seriously that there must be somewhere in the world without pain and suffering: “The best of two possible worlds”. But this was a vain hope because even the best had its own faults. As *Candide*’s Philosopher explained that the best always has perils: For instance, the kings of the world, specimens of the best. Yet they murdered each other to the last. *Candide* believed that there is always a hidden good in all human actions. But the best life is to plant a Garden and water it, clean and harvest the yields.

The implications of a Garden is that it saves you from boredom, vice and poverty. The simple life is the best!

Shaw wanted to confront all the anomalies of monotheistic Religions particularly their deviation from the spirit of the *Bible*, so he sent his mouthpiece, a Black, African Virgin in search for God among these Religions. The search was fruitless because all creeds had several Gods with their various limitations. So in desperation from a fruitless journey, the Black girl decided to trap a red haired Irish Rustic for a husband. They got married, planted a garden and had three kids. The implication of settling down with a garden is interesting because the garden prevented them from boredom, vice and poverty! And like *Candide*, the simple life is the best. But the attempt to settle the nagging vanities of human wishes did not stop with Voltaire or Bernard Shaw. It extends to the genius, the man of letters himself, Dr. Samuel Johnson, with his rich intellectual mind. Johnson was concerned about the futilities of human choices and the blunders that come out of these choices. So he wrote two texts to dramatize his feelings. These text are *Rasellas* and *The vanity of Human wishes*, a poem. In *The vanity of Human wishes*, he “dramatizes the futility of pursuing wealth and fame and ends with a stoic acceptance of human limitations as well as with the Christian advice that only if one cultivates charity, patience and faith, can one “make the happiness one does not find on earth”.(P. xx.) In *Rasellas* which is a philosophical tale he ridicules, the major characters’ blunders in making choices of life. And further shows the vanity of human wishes. In both texts, Johnson demonstrates his pragmatic theory of literature. That good literature should instruct as well as delight.

George Bernard Shaws metaphysical journey of *The Black girl in search for God* is a calculated ridicule of the *Vanity in the Human wishes* to understand the mind of God so as to serve Him well. These wishes fail as we can see in St John’s gospel: John 1-3). John failed because he thought he understood God enough to put Him in a Box, study Him, Understand Him, and so define Him. But he forgot that God Almighty is too large, too elaborate for the small, simple human brain to understand. And if we cannot understand Him, how can we define Him. John’s failure came from two narrative flaws! First was beginning his narrative with: in the beginning. Second was that he could not see the problem with the basic chemistry of his dialectics: The word was with God and the word was God.

The Black girl – confronts monotheistic Religions, and found their limitations. The search seemed to have left one area: The middle. The nonbelievers, the Atheists, Agnostics, naturalists, fundamentalists. These were the major failures of the Socratic dialectic: Dividing knowledge into two fractions: Good and Bad. This curious division leaves out the middle, the gray area. The problem here is that it is in this middle that most intellectuals, skeptics and fiery brains of a generation may believe. Shaw cramped all these divisions in W. European thought into a Freudian truism that Western civilization has its own discontent. That Western civilization is almost at its end. And that the next wave of civilization will be a Black civilization. The search ends with no absolute answers. But with only questions! Why and what? How?

Conclusion

Shaw's claim in this text was that Christianity would not lead a rational man to God. That the Whiteman had no right to inflict a God and his universe on the Africans, since the Whiteman did not even believe in this God himself. Because how could you teach a truth without believing in the truth yourself. This seems to be the paradoxical dilemma of the white Christians and their Theology.

But the primary conclusion was that Shaw was measuring the vicissitudes, anomalies and even limitations of Christianity through the sharp eyes of the Cartesian; Cogito ergo sum, the rationalist insight of Leibniz: Nihil est sine ratione and the sarcastic aphorisms of Milan Kundera to the Jewish Knesset in 1958: "Man Thinks, God Laughs." He was mocking the Christians' presumption to know God Almighty enough so as to prescribe rules and even modalities of service. These are the same mistakes that John made in his Gospel:

In the beginning was the word.

The word was with God. And the word was God. (John 1:1-3)

There are two major problems in John's narrative. The first was to begin his narrative with: "In the beginning", because a beginning is impossible. Because there will always be something before beginning. The second problem was trying to flaunt the Laws of simple chemistry with:

The word was with God. And the word was God.

The problem is that in the Laws of simple chemistry, if you combine two different elements in a chemical reaction, you will produce a compound that is completely different from the elements that formed it. But in John's equation, when he combined God and the word, a neutral compound was not formed! God remained God. Only God is!

The concern with John was that he may have underestimated the magnitude and enormity of the subject of his definition. So his definition collapsed. Shaw therefore was mocking the White Christians for not learning a lesson from St. John's Error!

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