International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)
ISSN: 2617-0299
www.ijllt.org

Ethics in a City "Too Busy to Hate": Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: April 18, 2019
Accepted: May 18, 2019
Published: May 31, 2019
Volume: 2
Issue: 3
DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.3.10

KEYWORDS

Tom Wolfe's A Man in Full; Emanuel Levinas; ethics of sensibility; ethics of Stoicism; race; Atlanta

ABSTRACT

Tom Wolfe in *A Man in Full* (1998) addresses the racial, political, cultural, and economic issues of the 1990s. Setting the novel in Atlanta, one of the most important cities of the American South, Wolfe probes America's racial and political history decades after the Civil Rights Movement. In this article, we look into the relationship between the white upperclass, the black middleclass and underclass depicted in Wolfe's novel before and after the black political empowerment through the lens of Emanuel Levinas's theory of alterity and the ethics of sensibility. By weaving different subplots together, we argue, the novel seems to suggest that a combination of the ethics of sensibility − with its emphasis on responsibility for the Other − and the ethics of Stoicism − with its emphasis on self-respect and self-responsibility − could contribute to the formation of much more ethical and responsible citizens.

1. INTRODUCTION

Released eleven years after Wolfe's bestselling novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, *A Man in Full* (*MF*) was widely anticipated. Despite being enthusiastically received by mainstream American newspapers and magazines on the occasion of its publication, *A Man in Full* had a hard time dealing with sharp criticism coming from more highbrow literary circles. Writing in the *New Yorker*, John Updike judged this novel "entertainment, not literature" (1998) while Norman Mailer, in the *New York Review of Books*, called it an "adroit commercial counterfeit" with a sentimental, predictable plot (1998). Rand Richards Cooper mixed praise for Wolfe's attempts at spreading the real life across the pages of this novel with a criticism of his reductionist characterization by focusing on "status" rather than "a whole person" (2001: 173). Whether criticisms leveled at *A Man in Full* are justified or not, Wolfe's novel has fulfilled its author's ambitions in "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast" and its merits should not be eclipsed. In this "social novel," Wolfe has tried, with some success, to capture the spirit of life in Atlanta during the 1990s as it addresses issues such as the hippie movement, sexual revolution, American youth culture, morality, racial conflicts, and class stratification both in white and black communities. The novel proposes that the legacy of racial segregation in the American South still casts a shadow on the life of the Atlantans despite black empowerment after the civil rights movement. The relationship between whites and blacks has gone way beyond the old racial line and has been involved with politics, power and class. In the city the novel presents, the relationship between the black middle class and the black working class is even more unethical than the relationship between blacks and whites.

In this racially segregated city, Wesley Dobbs Jordan, the black mayor, is after collecting votes for the upcoming election. He finds Fareek Fanon's case very appealing and takes the opportunity to secure his place as a true black leader concerned with black issues. Fanon is a black football star accused of date-raping the daughter of a wealthy white businessman, whose case quickly turns out to be a serious racial turmoil. The mayor is ready to do a deal with Charlie Croker, the Georgia Tech football star turned millionaire, who has a late midlife crisis: at sixty, he is suffering from a bad knee, doubts about his 28-year-old trophy wife and has high anxiety over the half-billion dollars he owes his creditors. The mayor promises Croker to take off the creditors' pressure if he supports Fanon in a press conference. However, the egoist Croker undergoes a profound transformation by Conrad Hensley's Stoic teaching and claims to be a free man by rejecting the mayor's offer of compromise. The novel invites the readers to look for something more meaningful in life than material goods, status and (white or black) political power. At a time when most people do not have religious beliefs, Wolfe in his novel tries to revive Epictetus's Stoicism for which Harold Bloom

remains grateful (Bloom, 2001:2).The aim of this article is to examine how ethics of Stoicism together with ethics of alterity are suggested, in this novel, as some solutions for the raised issues concerning racial relationships.

2. RACIAL PATTERN IN ATLANTA

Atlanta as a "postmodern international city" in *A Man in Full* has already been examined by Martyn Bone, who draws upon social and spatial theories of Fredric Jameson and Manuel Castells to elucidate Wolfe's emphasis on "the role of land speculation and real-state development in metropolitan Atlanta …in a finance-capitalist world-system" (2005:194). In this article, however, we focus on the racially segregated pattern of Atlanta and investigate how it contributes to the unethical relationships among its citizens.

Atlanta is no exception in the United States for having a racially segregated pattern. As Ronald Bayor argues, in Chicago, New York, Richmond and Atlanta blacks and whites live in different parts of the city as a result of "decades-old migration patterns, occupational choices, […] and mortgage policies" as well as racial residential patterns through "zoning, urban renewal and relocation, the building and placement of public housing, annexation efforts, racial agreements on which land would be used for housing, and the use of highways and roads as dividing tools" (1996: 53-4). The mayor accompanied by Roger White II (Fareek Fanon's lawyer) paints a "tableau of urban living" in Atlanta, stressing this racial segregation (*MF* 201). Their trip extends from extra wealthy whites in North Atlanta to poor black residency in the South. The driving tour begins at City Hall in Downtown and continues on to Buckhead by taking Piedmont Avenue. Heading north, they soon pass through "the old Black Downtown, the onetime center of Black society, black shopping, black professional life, [. . .] Edgewood Avenue, Auburn, Ellis Street, Houston. . . above all, Auburn" (*MF* 184). Auburn Avenue, which had been named "sweet Auburn" by the black leader, John Wesley Dobbs, has "nothing sweet about it now, . . . Black society had pulled out a long time ago in favor of the West End, Cascade Heights, and other neighborhoods to the West" (*MF* 184). Reaching Ponce de Leon, the narrator speaks about Atlanta's racial segregation in a perfect matter-of-fact way:

> Practically everybody in Atlanta old enough to care about such things knew that Ponce de Leon was the avenue that divided black from white on the east side of town. On the west side it was the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks. They might as well have painted a double line in the middle of Ponce de Leon and made it official, a white line on the north side and a black line on the south. (*MF* 185)

In fact, the greater population of Atlanta city, who are black, live in two thirds of the land below Ponce de Leon; however, as the mayor notes, they are "invisible to the rest of the world." "Other than City Hall and CNN and Martin Luther King memorabilia," nothing below Ponce de Leon exists in the maps prepared for the Olympics (*MF* 185). In contrast to the South Atlanta, Buckhead, as one of the richest white suburbs in the North Atlanta, is described as the "shopping heart of Atlanta," enjoying luscious green scenery, tall towers, great mansions, and shopping malls. In this suburb live powerful white businessmen, such as Inman Armholster and Charlie Croker as well as Georgia Tech' s football Coach, Buck McNutter (*MF* 186). Turning back southward, they pass Midtown and Downtown Atlanta, home to office and hotel towers. The towers are stretched on either side of Peachtree Street, which is "the business interests' dream for the twentieth century". The Bank of America Plaza (Planners Banc), One Atlantic Center, the Westin Peachtree Plaza, etc. were all built "to show you that Atlanta wasn't just a regional center, it was a national center" (*MF* 195). What is more, CNN Center, Georgia World Congress Center and Georgia Dome are supposed to boost Atlanta's position to become a "*world* center" in the twenty first century "the way Rome, Paris and London have been world centers in the past, and the way New York is today" (*MF* 195). Nevertheless, all Atlantans do not share this dream of becoming a world center and do not enjoy its prosperous business. "No sooner had they driven past the Georgia Dome and through International Plaza than Dexter, . . . crossed Northside Drive, and—*Pop*! All the glossy pomposity of the center of the world vanished, just like that" (*MF* 197).

Interestingly, all those towers are built in Downtown Atlanta on Peachtree Street crossing Ellis Street, Auburn and Edgewood Avenues, once occupied by the black businessmen. "Sweet Auburn" after the 1906 Race Riot, was regarded as the main center for the black business life. In 1956, *Fortune* magazine called Sweet Auburn "the richest Negro street in the world." Sweet Auburn and its neighborhood, however, suffered from the racially programmed postwar city renewal, issued following the National Housing Act of 1949 on slum clearance and redevelopment. City renewal, or "Negro Removal," according to Ronald Bayor, on the surface was an

attempt to reduce residential densities, remove deteriorating areas, and improve the living condition for blacks (1996: 49). Contrary to their official stance, however, urban renewal proved to have a devastating influence on the poorest people of Atlanta. Between 1956 and 1966, nearly 67000 people were dislocated for the sake of a "new" Atlanta (Silver & Moeser, 1995:152). As a consequence, many low-income black people living near the Downtown Central Business District (CBD) were removed and pushed to the houses built in the south and west of Atlanta.

Besides urban renewal, the white flight in the 1970s created an even more segregated Atlanta. Atlanta, according to the sprawl index of 2002, is the fourth most sprawling of eighty three metro areas in the United States, which suffers from "less compact housing, poor mix of homes and jobs, poor street connectivity, and weak town center" (Ewing, et. al., 2000). Lack of natural obstacles to limit the city and postwar policies to prevent polluted, overcrowded cities led Atlanta pursue construction of more and more suburban areas, resulting in separate and unequal economic development and segregated neighborhoods. Discriminatory federal mortgage subsidies for houses built in the suburbs (favoring whites while restricting lending to blacks) and refusal of suburban governments to build different housing types and integrating low-income public housing in the new construction have assisted the migration of the white middle and upper middle-class from the city, which in turn is followed by the movement of jobs, investment, and malls out of the city (Duany, *et. al., 2010:*134; Bayor, 2002:52). The housing boom of the 1980s and 1990s accelerated this shift from the inner city to the suburbs. By 1996 the city accounted for only 11% of the metropolitan population, while three suburban counties in the region (Dekalb, Cobb, and Gwinnett) had populations larger than the city of Atlanta (Hartshorn & Ihlanfeldt, 2002:22).

Charlie Croker is "*one of the giants who built this city*"; a developer who during the "building boom" helped to shape the sprawling Atlanta. Looking out of the window of his Gulf-stream Five, Charlie sees lands of forest stretched outside Atlanta and contemplates that "fewer than 400,000 people lived within the Atlanta city limits, and almost three-quarters of them were black; […] for the past thirty years all sorts of people, most of them white, had been moving in beneath those trees, into . . . rural communities that surrounded the city proper" (*MF* 63). *Edge City*, a book by Joel Garreau, had inspired megalomaniac Charlie in 1991 to build up his own office complex very far from the city. The book discussed the way the development of American cities take place "not in the old Downtown or Midtown, but out on the edges, in vast commercial clusters served by highways" (*MF* 63). In contrast to the prosperous edge cities or suburbs, the inner city of Atlanta suffers from neglect, lack of investment, job scarcity, poverty, crime, and deteriorating infrastructure. Vine City, where the mayor and Roger White lived as children, strikes Roger as an alien and abandoned neighborhood:

> Three vacant lots in a row . . . overgrown with weeds and saplings- . . . In the middle lot, all but hidden by the wild growth, was a short flight of wooden stairs leading to . . .nothing. . . […] he could see […] *junk.* […] The very sight of this rotting sump made Roger uneasy. (*MF* 198-9)

Few blocks away from Vine City, English Avenue (especially the Bluff), Fareek Fanon's neighborhood, is considered as "the worst slum" and the most dangerous area in Atlanta. This area is mostly inhabited by the poor blacks who are involved in drug dealing, assault, robbery and prostitution. The area is populated by teenagers who are "runners for the dealers," "seductresses [who are] addicts and prostitutes willing to do anything you can think of for another chunk of crack" (*MF* 205-6). Following the shift of investment and construction to the suburbs, the unskilled jobs in manufacturing, transportation, and communication industries, which had previously provided blue-collar jobs to black workers, fled from the inner city. Besides, lack of proper public transportation between suburbs and the city left the poor black people with inadequate jobs, weak city services and hideous crimes in the city (Duany, et.al., 2010:134; Hartshorn & Ihlanfeldt, 2002:36).

3. ETHICS OF SENSIBILITY VS. ALTERICIDE IN ATLANTA

The racially segregated Atlanta testifies to the long history of racial discrimination both during slavery and afterwards under the dehumanizing Jim Crow Laws, which oppressed and marginalized blacks, disfranchised them, denied their citizenship, and excluded them from social, political, and economic life. Deaf to the cry of blacks, who struggled for the recognition of their humanity, the whites limited them in certain social enclaves away from themselves, ignored their humanity and denied their rights. To use Emanuel Levinas's terminology, this exemplifies the self-committing altericide.

Emanuel Levinas, Lithuanian-born French-Jewish philosopher and religious thinker, in the twentieth century has given a special attention to the ethics of alterity. He claims that "ethics is first philosophy," that is, ethics cannot begin with ontology (most

traditional philosophies are ontological), instead ontology must begin from ethics since ontology should learn to encounter the Other as an "absolute Other." Western traditional philosophy, according to Brian Treanor (2006), follows Aristotle, who points out that ''all men by nature desire to know.'' Thus, when confronted with otherness, scientists and philosophers alike attempt to analyze the Other, to know it thoroughly, to place its strangeness into "a familiar system" in order to reduce its threat (3-4). In Levinas's revolutionary ethics, the Other is not reduced to the same, to the self or to the known, but its difference is respected and it exists on its own terms with no reference to the self. "The plot of proximity and communication is not a modality of *cognition*. The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying" (Levinas, 1991: 48). Consequently, the otherness of the Other remains intact. The self in its encounter with the Other does not question it, classify or name it; on the contrary, the self is called into question by the presence of the Other and has to justify its freedom. In this relationship, the Other calls the self's dogmatism, egoism and arbitrary freedom into question and by commanding "THOU SHALL NOT KILL" puts the responsibility for the Other on the self's shoulders. The "face" of the Other reminds the self that he is not alone in this world; the world is not his possession or reflection of his desire. This openness towards the Other, the Self's "vulnerability" and "exposure" to the Other, suffering for the suffering of the Other, "substitution" for the Other define what Levinas means by sensibility (Levinas, 1991:15,71,72)

Considering themselves masters of the world, for long, the white population had been indifferent towards the misery of the Other, been deaf to the cry "thou shall not kill" and by stereotyping blacks had reduced the infinity of the other to the intentionality of the "I"; they had categorized them in relation to themselves and defined them as opposite to 'white values'. The "naturalization of human difference" and the consequent racialization that "render some subjects or populations not only dispensable but excessive and necessarily eliminable" lead to the "death ethic of war," as "the darkest side of Western modernity," which refers to the suspension of ethics "that allows the production of premature death to become normative, at least for well-selected sectors in society and in the globe" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: xii). Hitlerism, imperialism, colonialism, and racism have made even ordinary life take the form of a war in which some groups appear to "be naturally selected to survive and flourish [while] others who appear to be, according to the dominant narratives of modernity, either biologically or culturally decrepit" are subject to elimination. Consequently, the self,considering himself as a master, stereotypes the Other based on differences and tends to eliminate the Other (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 2).

For the black self, "the white man is not only the Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary" (Fanon, 1968: 138). Franz Fanon analyzes particularly the self/other relationship between whites and blacks and concludes that after slavery the black man has enslaved himself. The black man has "recognized himself as a Negro, but, by virtue of an ethical transit, he also feels . . . that one is Negro to the degree to which one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of these Negro modes of behavior is white" (1968: 192). Contrary to Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondsman, Fanon maintains that the master, who is godlike, does not need the slave for gaining self-recognition; he does not acknowledge the existence of the slave and does not recognize him as the Other: "here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work." However, the slave does not resort to his work in order to achieve recognition and find liberty in the object, instead "the Negro wants to be like the master" (1968: 220–21). In an attempt to gain recognition by whites, blacks tried to erase the stereotyped differences and adopt white middle-class norms of behavior. Excluded from social, political and economic life, the only way blacks could prove themselves worthy of full citizenship and defy the "naturalized differences," was through their behavior. The educated elite, both male and female, encouraged black "masses" to adopt middle-class ideals in order to achieve respect from whites. By sticking to the "politics of respectability," as part of the ideology of racial uplift, the elites were determined to teach the black working-class "the value of religion, education, and hard work . . . temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals" (Higginbotham, 2003:199).

As Karen Ferguson (2002) postulates, only during the New Deal (Franklin Roosevelt's programs during 1933-36) blacks began to be recognized by the state and were able to step slightly outside the imposed marginality and could benefit from uplift ideology and respectability (6). During this time, Atlanta's black reformers, mostly university graduates, took the opportunity and were hired into federal agencies as "social workers, adult education teachers, and 'Negro Division' directors" (2002: 7). Nevertheless, the New Deal did not benefit all blacks and forced

black reformers to choose those who adhered to the ethos of respectability for inclusion. In the path to citizenship, those who conformed to the politics of respectability were included while the majority of the black working class were left behind, hence the ever-widening gulf between the black middle-class and working class in Atlanta (2002: 8-9).

The black middle-class, considered as the natural leaders of the black community, in the 1960s and the 70s, gained more power to the extent that in 1974, Maynard Jackson was elected as the first black mayor of Atlanta. Atlanta became the city for blacks, famous as "the Chocolate Mecca," and "the Black Beacon," where "the mayor was black, and twelve of the nineteenth city council members were black, and the chief of police was black, the fire chief was black, and practically the whole civil service was black, and the Power was black" (*MF* 19). The mayor who won the election with the support of blacks from all classes abandoned his initial efforts to improve the situation for all the black community since he saw the white business establishment as a force that could not be ignored. Therefore, through biracial coalition, "the Morehouse elite, are in league with White Establishment- the Piedmont Driving Club elite, to enrich each other at the expense of the ordinary people of the streets" (*MF* 104). For the same reason, black mayors, Maynard Jackson, Andy Young, Bill Campbell are called "Morehouse bluebloods," "Beige half- brothers" by Andre Fleet, Wes Jordan's rival in mayoral election. Fleet likens the mayors, who are "in the back pocket of the white Chamber of Commerce," to "an Oreo, black on the outside and white on the inside" (*MF* 104). People of southeast Atlanta do not see any affinity between themselves and the black middle-class of the Westside, Cascade Heights, and Niskey Lake. They do not see the elite class as their brothers and sisters and cannot imagine any of them walk in their neighborhood and be concerned with their problems since "they're not *hearing* . . . they're not *listening* to anybody but each other" and are "a little too busy tending to business over on . . . the other side of town" (*MF* 385,389). In other words, the black middle-class push the black "masses" to the place of the Other and do not feel responsible for them nor do they listen to their cries for equal humanity. Wes Jordan himself explains "the Atlanta way" and shows how only "a handful of people do everything" in the city. He likens Atlanta to a baseball with all the white strings under the hard cover representing the "three million white people in North Atlanta" and a small black core in the center representing "the 280,000 black folks in South Atlanta. They, or their votes, control the city itself." Through biracial coalition or "the Atlanta way," for example, Maynard Jackson has a deal with the white business interests over the billion-dollar airport project only on the condition that they give "30 percent of it to minority contractors." As a result, "That airport created twenty-five black millionaires" (*MF* 105).

Accordingly, the white businessmen support a mayor with whom they can do business (*MF* 105) and in return, the mayor only advances the interests of the white establishment and the black middle-class. In the airport project, Maynard is able to make few blacks millionaire while his affirmative programs do not touch the low-income blacks living in the inner city. Through compromises, the biracial coalition did very little to provide poor blacks with adequate housing, improved public schools, and job-training programs; neither did they prevent the flight of jobs from the inner city to the suburbs, nor did they help poor blacks live in or commute to the suburbs (Keating, 2001: 76; Bayor, 1996:52, 124). Subsequently, "social class played just as important a role in Atlanta politics as race during this period. Middle-class whites and the white and black lower classes had little influence and the biracial coalition largely ignored their interests" (Keating, 2001:70).

In order to hide their compromises and their irresponsibility and to keep the black power alive, black politicians made efforts to oppose whites on the surface and add fuel to the fire of white racism. Thus, as depicted by Wolfe, the black middle-class has an ambiguous relationship with whites. On the one hand, they aspire to be like middle-class whites, "look good in the eyes of 'the business interest'" (*MF* 739) and be recognized by them. On the other hand, they feel guilty if they do not oppose whites since "an authentic black" always opposes whites and is "at war" with them (McWhorter, 2001:232). During the "Freaknik," a black spring break party, when rich black college students, "driving BMWs, Geos, […] and millions of dollars' worth of cars," tied up the streets of Atlanta, Roger White is "pulled in two directions": for one thing, he feels excited by the young black America "shaking its black booty right in [their] pale trembling faces," "mocking" and making fun of the whites (*MF* 23). For another, his other part "lost heart" because he has an appointment with Coach Buck McNutter, who "is very white" (*MF* 23). In his professional life, he works with and for white clients, he is interested in Western architecture and music, yet he has to show opposition to whites to avoid feeling guilty. He "hated himself. Maybe he *was* too white" (*MF* 24). Roger Ahlstrom White II was sarcastically called "Roger Too White" by his classmates at Morehouse for being an admirer of Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King, both of whom were regarded not enough of a fighter

because of their "Atlanta Compromise speech of 1895" and "gradualism and Gandhism" respectively. In "the late seventies, [...] you had to be for the legacy of the Panthers and CORE and SNCC […] or you were *out of it*" (*MF* 24). Washington and King were "finished" and "nobody wanted to even hear about all that. They wanted to hear about *confrontations* with the White Establishment and gunfights with the cops that brothers had had in the sixties" (emphasis added, *MF* 25).

By opposing Western art and architecture, stuffing his office with Yoruban artifacts got on loan from museums, and rejecting the invitation to join the Piemond Driving Club, the epitome of White Establishment, the mayor hopes to show that he is supporting the black community, especially the blacks from the streets. Through opposition to whites, keeping alive the fire of white racism as the only reason for the blacks' failure, and "claiming the status of a victim," "the race holder gives up the sense of personal responsibility he needs to better his condition. These people ask whites to be fully responsible for something blacks and whites share responsibility for" (Steele, 1990:33). When Charlie Croker at the press conference reveals the mayor's compromise with the White Establishment regarding the Fanon's case, the mayor takes the opportunity to accuse Croker of being a racist, who "delivered that sneak attack on Fareek Fanon" to ruin his character, his future and stop him from having a successful career (*MF* 725). In order to benefit from the case, Wes Jordan paid two gossip columnists to write against Fanon with their "Chasing the Dragon" article and simultaneously prepared a "halfway riot" supporting Fanon to give a "real voltage" to the blacks' "widespread anger," to show that the city is very concerned and angry about this case. Although Croker declares his ignorance about the truth of Fanon's case and thinks that Fanon, like a typical sport hero, is "arrogant, obnoxious, impertinent, [and] thinks the world owes him whatever he wants, he does not "necessarily jump from that to say he'd do whatever he wants" (MF 720). The mayor who himself believes that the "kid is a jerk" (*MF* 106), uses this situation to prove his point, that is, "the 'business interests' were determined to be unfair and unjust" towards Fanon and he is "Fareek's one defender in public life! Now [he is] right on top of what is known as a 'black issue'" (*MF* 737). Therefore, contrary to Levinas's ethics of alterity, the black self puts all responsibility on the white Other. By claiming victimhood, Wes Jordan plays the race card and abuses the black power. He is reelected with no prospect for change in the condition of poor black people: the abandoned decaying houses in the English Avenue with their miserable inhabitants would not gain any attention from the City Hall; the black youngsters would continue strolling the streets of inner city at the school time, selling and buying drugs; rape, prostitution, rubbery, and murder would be the only reality in those areas deprived of adequate job, investment and security.

4. STOICISM

Although *A Man in Full*, like the Liberal structuralists, presents a correlation between the poor environment and black failure, it does not regard human beings as passive creatures condemned to annihilation at the hands of the unfortunate fate. For Tom Wolfe, who believes in the human soul, perseverance, individual transformation, and self-discipline, the complete surrender to the environment is out of question. To encourage human strength, he resorts to the pre-Christian ethics of Stoicism, promoting self-respect, self-responsibility and self-improvement. Through the subplot concerning Conrad Hensley, a white member of the working class, the novel suggests that class stratification in the American community at large ranks as important an issue as racism. From childhood, Conrad suffers from poor living condition. His parents were "two aging, rumpled, irresponsible, ruined" hippies, who were lazy, unemployed, immoral drug addicts. Unlike his parents who rejected the yoke of "bourgeoisie," he dreamt of a "bourgeois" life as long as it stood for "order, moral rectitude, courtesy, cooperation, education, [and] financial success" (*MF* 171). To fulfill his dream, he enrolls in a college and manages it by doing odd jobs. However, his marriage to Jill and his two children force him to leave the college and work hard in one of the Croker Global Foods' warehouses in the "suicidal freezer unit." Conrad never lets the "nihilism" of the American culture, represented in its music, movies and fashion, disappoint him, "poison" his mind and "put No! in [his] heart" (*MF* 116). As Cornel West points out, the spread of "nihilism," meaning "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness" has become America's greatest enemy (14).

The rap songs sung by a chorus of "a group of sex-crazed crack fiends" are replete with sexual stimulation, "threat of rape," "infidelity," and "illiterate troubadours of dog-like sex" (*MF* 18, 209,211).These "vulgar" songs together with those "Country Metal Headbangers" singing "jailhouse talk" and the disappointing rap songs by Snuff Out or the carefree message of "Crash 'n' burn" constitute the culture of American youth, both black and white (*MF* 113, 114, 116). Fashion also signifies the

"nihilism" present among them. Kenny wears a T-shirt, "advertising an Oakland radio station, KUK: 'I Don't Give a KUK . . . fuh nuthun but Kuntry Metal 107.3 FM" and a baseball cap with the word "SUICIDE" inscribed on its undersurface (*MF* 113). The black youth in the Bluff as well as the rich black college boys wear fashionable "Ghetto Boy" clothes, "jailhouse fashion": "baggy jeans whose crotches hung down to their knees, . . green rags wrapped about their heads, like pirates" (*MF* 20, 201). They want to wear jailhouse fashions to show that jail is "not foreign to their life." They do not even fear going to jail and think of it "as an extension of the hood" (*MF* 205). It seems that the nihilistic American culture together with the poor living condition have trapped both black and white underclass and there is no way out for them. However, through the teachings of the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, Conrad learns that people are not free beings left with "life's infinite possibilities," but imprisoned creatures in "hard, brutal, punishing, narrow and confining" life where "fairness and unfairness are beside the point" (*MF* 411). Yet, there is a portion of Zeus's divinity in each of human beings, "a spark from his power, the power to act and not to act, the will to get what is good and the will to avoid what is evil." If people accept their limited choices and have faith in their own will and their own divine power, they "will not groan, will not blame no man, will flatter none." They would see any obstacle and misfortune in life as a "trial," a means for making one a stronger character, "an Olympic conqueror, but . . . not . . . without sweat" (*MF* 398). Conrad himself through these teachings gains more self-confidence, relies more on his physical strength and decides to continue his education. As such, *A Man in Full* by reviving the ethics of Stoicism with its emphasis on affirmation of one's worth and belief in one's will and abilities, like Conservative behaviorists, refutes nihilism, hopelessness and irresponsibility. Nonetheless, this ethics seemingly should be considered as supplemented with ethics of sensibility so as not to be mistaken for a justification of the self-serving black middle-class or the egoist whites. Conrad feels uneasy about the teachings of Epictetus regarding one's obligation to the Other: "If a thing goes against another's nature, you must not take it as evil for you. For you are not born to share humiliation or evil fortune but to share good fortune. And if a man is unfortunate, . . . his misfortune is his own fault; for Zeus created all men for happiness and peace of mind" (*MF* 445). Stoics' stress on rationality as opposed to emotion can explain their attitudes: "What falls outside our agency, whether a natural event or the act or fortune of other persons, need not and should not affect our status and values as rational minds; so we should regard all such things as the way they had to be in this God-directed world" (Epictetus cited in Long, 2002: 180).

Although Epictetus allows the emergence of "good feelings," such as "sociability, kindness and affection [as well as] moral responsibility" in his ethics, his advice to the stoic facing a "distraught person" is to avoid becoming "upset [… and] feeling that person's pain" (Long, 2002: 247). Conversely, ethics of sensibility is based on emotion, feelings, and love when the self feels the suffering of the other and is responsible for him. In his relationship with the helpless inmate, who reminds him of Pocahontas, Conrad follows the ethics of sensibility when he substitutes himself for him and feels his pain: "Conrad was shaken. What if it had been me!" (*MF* 444). The inmate's helpless face raises his sense of responsibility and his "dreadful posture" possesses Conrad with "the urge to do something for him, to talk to him, give him some encouragement. . . or something" (*MF* 447). After being raped by Rotto, the inmate's face urges Conrad to take action while no one else made a move. "[His] face, more ghastly-looking than ever, bore a strange expression. The flesh of his eyebrowless brow was contorted and his mouth hung open. .. sobbing without making a sound. .. Conrad got up from his stool, *impelled* by something he could *no longer reason* with, . . . a rushing sound rose in his skull" (emphasis added, *MF* 450). He also feels guilty for not feeling responsible for the "sad, strange and friendless" inmate earlier, for being deaf to his cry for help: "why he had never offered him the hand of, if not friendship, comradeship? Why had he left him flounder in this gray concrete hole, totally isolated, totally without the simplest word of encouragement or council?"(*MF* 453) Though influenced by Stoics, Conrad cannot feel at ease by Stoic's rather indifferent attitude towards the Other. He feels compelled to act and feel the suffering of the Other.

The inmate is not the only one for whom Conrad feels responsible. He also feels responsible for Croker, who after the knee surgery and facing bankruptcy looks broken, desperate and terribly depressed. He believes that he was destined to come to Atlanta to save Croker: "now he had a chance […] to convert a man of money and power and renown. …to recruit him and all his resources into the service of Zeus" (*MF* 688-89).Conrad teaches Croker about Stoicism and forces him to see his state in a new light. In the press conference, Croker, transformed by Conrad's teachings, claims to be "a man with complete tranquility," a man who no longer strives after a bigger development, a bigger house, a plantation. Now he calls his possessions "trifles" and hands them all over to his creditors (*MF* 722). He finally becomes an evangelist, seeing himself

responsible for all the others and feeling the urge to enlighten them to see through their mundane consumerist life. He talks about "The Manager," who has given every person "a spark of his own divinity, and no one can take that away from you, and from that spark comes your character. Everything else is temporary and worthless in the long run" (*MF* 723). Ironically, Croker becomes "a man in full" not at the time of being a successful real estate developer, but at the time of his collapse, when he understands that one's integrity means completeness.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, *A Man in Full* fulfills its promise as a social criticism by pinpointing the hypocrisy, racial anxieties, class problems, and mistrusts hidden underneath Atlanta, which has a reputation for being "too busy to hate." What this city lacks is the consideration of both ethics of sensibility and Stoicism, whereby whites would not stereotype blacks based on the "naturalized differences." What is needed is an ethics based on which whites, without reducing the blacks' strangeness to their own intentionality, would see themselves responsible for blacks whose humanity had been ignored for generations. On the other hand, blacks − who gained political power by emphasizing their innocence during the struggles of 1960s − would see themselves responsible both to whites and the black underclass without creeping into "victimhood" and passing all the responsibilities to whites. The black government would listen to the Other and revitalize the forgotten neighborhoods by improving the infrastructures in those areas, attracting more investment, creating more jobs and reviving the lost hope. Ethics of Stoicism also encourages individuals to fight against "nihilism," which threatens their self-worth and their meaningful life. By being hopeful and loving themselves and others, the black underclass should also take responsibility for their actions and struggle with the unfortunate fate. Hence, Wolfe's novel, read in terms of ethics, drives home the idea that "structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand" (West, 2001: 12), that is , both self-responsibility and responsibility for the Other are needed for having a more just society.

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