

ACCULTURATION IN JACQUELINE ANNE FRENCH'S *NANBERRY: BLACK BROTHER WHITE*

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Abstract

This paper foreshadows the cultural conflicts in the novel Nanberry: Black Brother White. Jacqueline Anne French is an Australian author writing across a number of children's genres including historical fiction, fantasy, picture books and gardening books. She has written over 140 books and has won more than 60 national and international awards. She is also a regular contributor to newspapers and magazines around Australia including the Australian Women's Weekly and Canberra Times. Most of her novels are based on historical events and characters which add further understanding towards culture. An essential element of historical fiction is that it is set in the past and pays attention to the manners, social conditions and other details of the period depicted. This novel in particular describes the clash of two cultures and consequences for both sides. Nanberry is a complex and pivotal character in this novel. As a child, he is acculturated to white ways of thinking. But he also remembers his own cultural background. He is isolated by the fact that white people generally do not accept him and by the fact that his own people are suspicious of him as well. This novel is therefore a lament for Nanberry's life and a celebration of it as well. To conclude, this paper is to show the cultural variance experienced by Nanberry.

Key Words: *Aboriginal Culture, Cultural Conflict, Acculturation, History, White People.*

Acculturation in Jacqueline Anne French's *Nanberry: Black Brother White*

Culture is a term that incorporates the norms found in the society. It has a connectivity with knowledge, laws, beliefs, arts, customs, capabilities, and the practice of the individuals as well. A cultural norm is a code of acceptable action or conduct in the society. It acts almost as a guideline for behavior, language, dress and decorum in a situation, which acts as a pattern for expectations in the society. Ruth Benedict opines, "The crucial differences which distinguish human societies and human beings are not biological. They are cultural"(Ruth Benedict Quote).

In humanities, the perspective of culture as ascribed to an individual has been the grade to which they have accomplished a certain level of sophistication. It includes the areas such as arts, sciences, education and the manners of an individual. This kind of cultural sophistication is also

used to categorize civilizations. Class based differences between high culture and low culture is also evident because of such hierarchical perspectives on culture.

In one way or the other, culture plays an important role in the society. It is culture that determines the true identity of a person. The respect that an individual gets from the society is an effect of one's social behavior, which is a manifestation of culture. So, a person's each and every act is almost a product of his/her culture.

This paper emphasizes the cultural conflicts in the novel *Nanberry: Black Brother White*. It further explains the concept of Acculturation which happens to be the reason for the cultural variance experienced by the protagonist of the novel, *Nanberry: Black Brother White*. The writer of this novel, Jacqueline Anne French is a celebrated Australian author who has written many books for adults and young adults. She has written more than 140 books. She is a multi-awarded children's author and considered more popular among other writers in Australia. Her books are about history, ecology, fantasy, gardening, pest control, wombats and other wildlife. She has contributed her worthy ideas to newspapers and magazines in Australia. Some notable magazines are *Australian women's weekly*, and the *Canberra Times*.

This chosen novel *Nanberry: Black Brother White* comprises the themes such as the history and culture of Aboriginal people, early settlement, invasion, landownership and management, women's rights, loss, love and war. An important feature of the historical fiction is that it is set in the past and gives attention to the current social setting, and other details of the period. It is applicable to this novel. There is a historical relevance throughout the novel and the plot moves alongwith the protagonist Nanberry. In one way, it can be said that the plot moves from the native of Nanberry to the place he has been taken to.

Nanberry: Black Brother White is an interesting story which deals with Australia's first surgeon. Nanberry, the protagonist is an eight-year-old boy who has been adopted by the surgeon. The readers can locate the concept of nativity in the very beginning of the novel as it shows little Nanberry playing on the beach along with his family. It is after that, the note of colonization exist in the novel. The family members witness the arrival of strange ships in the Warrane. The ships' arrival seems to be a strange premonition to them. Their way of life came to an end, which is explained by Jackie French through her words, "The breeze held the scent of strange things now, of memories of a world far away"(4).

Surgeon John White has been sent to rescue a group of native people who have been inflicted with pox. He returns with Nanberry who has been orphaned. John White decides to take Nanberry to his household as his son. The moment when Nanberry left his native and went to the Surgeon's house seems to be the beginning of acculturation in the novel. It further explains the tragic displacement of Aboriginal people during that time.

Being an eight-year-old child, Nanberry is acculturated to white ways of behaving and thinking. But there was no acceptance on either sides. He lives alongwith the white people who hate him, but the cultural values imbibed in him is his native one. This shows, even after his displacement or dislocation, he remembers his cultural background. Culture seems to be an issue

for Nanberry as, he is isolated by white people, and the people of his own clan started suspecting him. So, Nanberry's position is somewhere in between these two.

Further, this novel explains the interest of Nanberry, the native boy. He likes to spend a part of his life as a sailor. So, he believes in three worlds. One is the sea life and the other one is on land. He considers the life on land as two parts : Black and White. This is because he witnesses both black and white people on land but could not think them as one group, as one dominates the other. This shows that Nanberry is aware of Social hierarchy and the prevailing conditions of native people among the white ones. Even though he stays with white people and behaves like one. He is not considered as white boy.

Cultural values are deeply explained through surgeon White's approach in this novel. Surgeon White is considered as an enigmatic hero as well. Though he visits a new colony, he is not impressed by it. He always wishes to return to his place, England as he believes in leading a normal life. However, he established a home in Port Jackson with his servant Rachel, his foster son Nanberry and also his illegitimate son Andrew and a pet, O'Possum. But he could not acknowledge his bond with them. It is because he believes that his real son's future lies in returning to England and educating him as a gentleman.

Surgeon White fails to recognize that he has got a family for him and abandon the people who actually care for him. It is because of the fixed thoughts that he has over his mind. This shows the clash of two cultures and the consequences of both the sides. Surgeon has been projected almost like a convict in this novel, as he gives importance to the customs of White people.

And throughout the novel, it is implied that Nanberry is both victim and victor. According to his people, Nanberry is transgressive towards white language and customs as he refused to bow to the White man's dominance. He is a victim because, he loses his family and another reason is that he has to turn against his brothers as he is with White people. He lost his family because of White people who landed on their place with small pox and spread it. This novel gives a hint on the war between the cadigal people and the White people that is between Bennelong and the White people.

Aboriginal people had their names for places which was renamed by White settlers. That has been mentioned by the protagonist. Nanberry thinks to himself, There was a time for the settling of disputes, and a time to go west to feast on eels, a time when the bees wore fluffy yellow pollen on their legs, when you knew that in another season of moons the nectar would flow sweet and pale green when you poked a stick into the honey trees. (13)

There are many references to the indigenous beliefs in the text. Some of them are, a warrior's code of honour and individual ownership of land. Apart from the conflicts, many Aborigines died due to small pox and influenza. Aboriginal self-determination was expressed. Like Nanberry, many people were tolerated when they obey and follow White society's rules. They are taken as either servants or patronized as foster children, but then discarded.

The Transformation of the protagonist showed in the novel is because of his cultural variance. He has adapted himself according to the social conditions. But the society he lives in

does not accept him. The capability to adapt is the result of acculturation as shown by the protagonist Nanberry. Jacqueline French has mentioned in an interview as such, The one thing you show readers by writing about history is not be afraid of change. Tomorrow always is going to be different from yesterday. It always has been. But human beings are extra ordinarily good survivors, superb adapters. We are very good at creating a sort of world that we want. (How I Write: Jackie-French).

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